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London : GRANT RICHARDS, 1899.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE MARQUISE

BY

MRS. BELLOC-LQWNDES



1411

LONDON

GRANT RICHARDS

9 HENRIETTA STREET, COVENT GARDEN, W.C.

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“ Madame la Marquise, votre bras est bien fait,
Votre taille est bien prise, et votre pied parfait ;
J’aime sur votre joue cette mouche de velours,
Votre ravissante moue et vos piquants discours !
Mais songez, toute belle, que peut-être à l’instant
Votre grand fils Valère revient du régiment !
Adieu, les succès à la Cour !
Il faut que chacun ait son tour.”

Old French Song.

“ ‘ . . . and what is the use of a book,’ thought Alice,
‘ without . . . conversations?’ ”

Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland.



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I

THE MARQUIS DE RABUTIN
WRITES

B



THE MARQUIS DE RABUTIN WRITES

To the MARQUISE CORISANDE DE RABUTIN,
chez MISTRESS FURLEIGH,
99 Whitehall Terrace 99,
Londres, S.W.

CHÂTEAU DE RABUTIN-CHANTAL,
July 19, 1896.

MY VERY DEAR MAMAN,

You see I obey your commands and write in English. How it carries me back to those far-off days when I was the most happy of infants, building unstable fortifications and marvellous castles in the yellow sand of Dieppe, while the kindest and prettiest of young mammas—dressed in a robe of white muslin covered with little black dots, each of which I, with the cruel

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imagination of infancy, imagined to be the ghost of an insect sacrificed to the mode—embroidered a mauve cushion. Oh, that cushion! I see every line, every silk thread of it as I write. I wonder if Sir George remembers it. How many hours he spent, while you worked patiently, in teaching me the true principles of sand architecture! We always knew you, even when you were a long way off, by the mauve cushion!

You fear I may forget my English. Believe me, once acquired, this original language remains in the spirit. At least I retain enough to *barbouiller* une lettre to my dear Maman, and to flatter wisely and well our autocrat of the nursery. Her English is not my English, but she has infinite condescendence, and the infant is all that could be dreamed. Seriously, he is a marvel. I do not say this because of my paternal pride. Even my wife's mother is satisfied. Though she completely scorns the methods, she approves of the result, only maintaining that my son's head should at least be bereft of soap till the long robes in which they roll his

poor legs are replaced by more masculine garments.

The whole of our little world are in ecstasies over him. He raises his head and regards us with interest. I am told this is most unusual in so young an infant. His hair, which is—in parenthesis—the true “auburn” the English so cultivate, pushes beautifully. Madame Nurse, so I discovered she prefers to be called, at first showed a disposition to banish me from her domain at certain critical moments, but I have established my right to survey the toilette night and morning. So far he is an amphibian; my mother-in-law declares he will be a Marine. Geneviève sees him as a bishop, possibly as Pope—it is time, she says, we had a French Pope. As for the irreventious André, he considers his nephew will make, owing to the conformation of his ribs, a jockey, “first-class all right.” For me, when my son looks at me with those wise inscrutable eyes, I feel infinitely ignorant.

You ask for news of André. We see him often, but, alas! so does his inamorata. In

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vain we cause him to meet charming young girls, bewitching married women, and widows—a derivative is everything—he remains in adoration before the image, and gossip goes its train. Even the General approached the subject with me. If only Captain Pharamond could be transferred—I do not say to Madagascar, but to Corsica, or even Algiers. There our poor André could not follow her. What makes us all suffocate is that we have the certainty that *il en est pour sa peine*, therefore it eternises itself. Even Geneviève, and you know, Maman, how pious is my wife—I repeat that even Geneviève would like to think more ill of the siren than we are able to do, but alas! she poses to him as an angel, and declares that his soul is her *objectif*. Together they read poetry! Do you see our André reading poetry? From what I know of the lady it must be an initiation for the two.

My handsome-mother, always practical, declares that there is only one solution—the death of the husband. Thank heaven, he is in the best of health. Imagine that woman

introduced into our family ! The poor André, to do him justice, does not think of that possibility. No, he spends every moment he should be elsewhere at her feet, avoiding the husband so far as is possible in so small a town. I hear her boudoir is a tropical forest. He even sends to Paris for flowers. As Sir George would say, It is a bad business.

My respectful homages to Mistress Furlough, and to our excellent Sir George a good shakehand.

I kiss you tenderly, and beg to subscribe myself, very dear Maman, de tous vos serveurs le plus affectueux et le plus dévoué,

PAUL.

II

THE THREE WIDOWS

THE THREE WIDOWS

IT is a sunny afternoon in the middle of July. Sitting round a tea-table under a plane-tree in the garden of No. 99 Whitehall Terrace are—MRS. FURLEIGH, mid-Victorian to her finger-tips, and richly but soberly dressed in modified widow's weeds, the handiwork of her highly-esteemed maid, Nagg, who has been with her since her marriage; her sister, MRS. BUTLER-GREEN, who looks much more than three years younger than Mrs. Furleigh, though close observation reveals a few crow's-feet, in a well-cut gown showing some signs of wear; and MADAME LA MARQUISE CORISANDE DE RABUTIN. The Marquise prefers to be the age that she looks, which is less than she is. Her powdered hair forms an agreeable contrast to her bright blue eyes, and the merits of her black lace gown are attested by the envy which it excites in the gentle hearts of both her friends.

MRS. FURLEIGH (*sighing heavily*)—Here we three are again, all widowed! How strange it is, isn't it, that the only grandmother should be Corisande?

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THE MARQUISE—? ?

MRS. BUTLER-GREEN (*briskly*)—Certainly not the fault of your dear girls. As for mine——

MRS. FURLEIGH (*shocked*)—Olivia! how can you talk so? She has such high spirits, Corisande. Of course my loss is so much more recent than either of yours. But children are a great comfort, and I am so fortunate in my sons-in-law—such dear fellows, always glad to come and stay with me when I am in town. I should really have been tempted to give up this great house if it hadn't been for the girls and their husbands. Of course it saves them a great deal of expense. As for Gerald, he likes the country best. Such a good thing! London is full of distractions for young men. He is in Paris now, Corisande; I wonder you didn't meet him there.

THE MARQUISE (*smiling*)—But I do not live in Paris, dear friend.

MRS. FURLEIGH—But when you were passing through, I mean. Paris is so much smaller than London, it is quite difficult to

avoid meeting one's friends there. I am sure you will like my Gerald. He is such a dear fellow. So unlike other young men. He never gives me a moment's anxiety. He is so clever, too—only the other day our old friend Mr. Brightson said to me, "Really, Mrs. Furleigh, I wonder your son doesn't go into Parlia——" (*Then, as Mrs. Butler-Green, rising abruptly, goes across the lawn into the house*) Isn't Olivia odd? She can't bear to hear any one's children discussed but her own. Now, I, dear Corisande, am always so interested in your dear boys. Let me see, how old is Jules—twenty?

THE MARQUISE (*quietly*)—Not Jules, dear friend—Paul. He is twenty-five and has just made me a grandmother. Then, you know, my second, André, is two years younger than Paul. He is accomplishing his military service, poor boy, but fortunately in a garrison close to his brother and kind sister-in-law.

MRS. FURLEIGH (*earnestly*)—Then you really like your daughter-in-law, dear? Somehow Gerald and I never like the same girls.

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Isn't it curious? Ah, they manage those things so well in France! I have always maintained that there's a great deal to be said for the French system. I suppose *you* chose Paul's wife.

THE MARQUISE (*smiling*)—Well, not exactly. She is the daughter of an old friend. I will admit to you that as she lay in her cradle—let me see, nineteen years ago this autumn—her mother said to me, "She will make a nice wife for your little Paul!"

MRS. FURLEIGH (*with great interest*)—How very far-seeing and—and—how very sensible! Now I know a girl, the daughter of old acquaintances, their place is near ours, but not too near, you understand. I never thought of it when she was an infant, for they weren't quite—quite, you know! But times change and things alter. She is an only child, and her father is now very well off. Unfortunately she and Gerald detest one another. Such a pity, for positively she is the only girl in the neighbourhood who could be thought of in connection with

Gerald. I suppose your daughter-in-law was an heiress?

THE MARQUISE (*in a reserved tone*)—No, she had a pretty fortune, but she is one of five.

MRS. FURLEIGH (*startled*)—Dear me, how strange! I thought that French people always married for money and never had large families.

THE MARQUISE—? ?

MRS. FURLEIGH—Oh, well, as I was saying, I know quite well I shall not like my daughter-in-law, but I mustn't be selfish, I have to consider my boy's happiness. He is eight-and-twenty next month and has never shown the slightest liking to any one, if—if—well, there was a trifling fancy for Olivia's youngest girl, Jenny, but we needn't count that. (*Lowering her voice*) Of course, the moment I perceived the danger I put my foot down. I said nothing, not a word, but Olivia quite understands. I never ask them to Erth when Gerald is at home. Of course there may be nothing in it, but May, my younger daughter, you know, who has always

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been very intimate with Jenny, warned me of what was going on, and then I immediately remembered a number of things I hadn't noticed at the time they occurred. Ah, Corisande, you are to be pitied for having no daughters! My girls are wonderfully quick in detecting anything that is wrong. I don't know what I should do without them.

THE MARQUISE (*thoughtfully*)—Frankly, Jane, I do not understand Olivia's position. I had always imagined she had made a brilliant marriage. She—she—does not look happy.

MRS. FURLEIGH (*shaking her head*)—No, indeed, poor creature! Colonel Butler-Green was very imprudent and left her shamefully badly off. Then just think of it—three daughters, all unmarried, and likely to remain so, I fear. What they would do without my kind brother George, heaven only knows! Of course, fortunately for Olivia, George shows no desire to marry. (*Glancing at her friend*) You know him so well, Corisande, has it ever occurred to you that he would marry—now, at his age?

THE MARQUISE (*composedly*)—I have not given the subject much thought, my dear Jane. He is a very charming man, and no doubt many of your friends would be pleased to become your sister.

MRS. FURLEIGH — Oh, well! I don't know——

THE MARQUISE—But to return to our poor Olivia?

MRS. FURLEIGH (*plaintively*)—I could have helped the girls so much if it had not been for this silly affair between Gerald and Jenny. Olivia actually takes her daughter's part—so very ungrateful after all I have done for her. Of course we do not discuss the subject, but she makes me feel in many little ways that she considers me a perfect monster of cruelty. It's very hard on me that my only sister should be so unreasonable, but I owe a duty to my children. Olivia cannot look at a thing from any standpoint but her own. She is so unreasonable. You see, Jenny is the youngest and has always been her mother's favourite.

THE MARQUISE — And is there any

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serious objection to little Jenny? I know you do not mind the marriage of first cousins.

MRS. FURLEIGH (*hastily*) — My dear Corisande, May's marriage was quite a different matter. You see she was a girl. I'm sure that makes all the difference. As to Jenny, I admit she is the least objectionable of my nieces, but they are all—well, without being unkind I think I may say that they are what we used to call bad style. Mabel and Olive are supposed to be very lively and pleasant, but I think that forward assured manner very unpleasing in young women. As to Jenny (*hesitating*)—Jenny is much quieter. I know George thinks her the cleverest of all his nieces. She is peculiar. I can't make her out. I only know one thing—she would never make my Gerald a good wife. Besides, without being mercenary, I admit I am anxious that Gerald's wife should have something. Life has become so terribly expensive nowadays. As I said to Gerald the other day, so many men in these days propose to any girl they

meet without stopping to think of the Death Duties.

THE MARQUISE (*murmuring*)—Si jeunesse savait, si vieillesse pouvait. . . .

MRS. FURLEIGH—Eh, what?

THE MARQUISE (*sighing*)—Alas! And I who thought from your brother's account that in England at any rate the little God of Love had found a safe retreat.

MRS. FURLEIGH (*eagerly*)—Oh, but you mustn't mistake my meaning. If Gerald were to fall in love with some sweet nice girl whom I felt I could really take to my heart, I should not be so unreasonable as to ask for a fortune. Flora is so sorry that he sees nothing of our neighbour, the Dowager Duchess of Hertfordshire. She has a charming daughter—limps a little perhaps, but so well-bred and refined. However, we need not discuss dear Gerald. He is away, you know, and after all perhaps May's sisterly love made her suspicious. The dear girls are so fond and proud of their brother, they would do anything to please him! But

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really, this is too bad. Well, my dear, I have letters to write, so I will send Olivia out to you. Of course I can rely on you to repeat nothing of what I have told you. Stop, though! If she asks anything you might say perhaps—no, on second thoughts say nothing; after all silence is golden, and she is so unreasonable. How few people can put themselves in another's place! (*returning to the house*).

MRS. BUTLER-GREEN (*coming out and joining the Marquise in obedience to orders*)—Well, I suppose Jane has been posting you up in the politics of the family. So like her! As if George didn't tell you everything! No, no, don't protest! Unlike Jane I ask no questions and am told—no matter! I'm glad to see you again, my dear, after all these years. As I grow older our Boulogne school days come back to me so vividly and always pleasantly. I believe they've pulled down the dear old convent and built over that lovely garden overlooking the ramparts, so I suppose the Dames Anglaises have migrated to the lower town. Oh, how happy

we were, Corisande! I've never had such a good time since.

THE MARQUISE (*pensive*)—Nor I.

MRS. BUTLER-GREEN—And poor feckless Uncle Geordie, with his Sunday trips to England! Isn't it curious to think that if it hadn't been for my mother's affection for that good-for-nothing brother of hers, we shouldn't be sitting here now? After all, I owe the pleasantest memories of my dull girlhood to him. Of course it was different for Jane. Boulogne must have been very slow for a grown-up girl. Yet how lucky she's been (*sighing*). My brother-in-law was not only very wealthy, he was one of the worthiest and dullest of men. She might have searched all England over and not found another husband who would have suited her half so well. Seeing you again has brought back to me the happy old days, but I must not forget the present. Dear Corisande, I think you will like my girls, whatever ill you may hear of them. At any rate I'm quite sure you will like Jenny, for she is George's favourite. No, no, no! Do

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let me say anything that comes into my head, it is such a relief. I fear Providence never intended me for a poor relation.

THE MARQUISE (*hesitating*) — I think Jane is kind.

MRS. BUTLER-GREEN (*bitterly*) — Jane intends to be kind, but when I think of all she could do, and of all she leaves undone. I'm not unreasonable, I don't quarrel with my bread and butter, but—well, there are things one cannot discuss even with one's dearest friend. No, I am thankful for small mercies—that shows to what I'm reduced, my dear! I suppose I have you to thank for Flora's graciously worded invitation (*opening a note*). Listen!

“DEAR AUNT O.—We hope to see you and the girls on the 25th July. We have had to give up Cowes this year. I am afraid I must ask you to leave on the 10th August as we are going up north for the 12th. Perhaps Uncle G. will be able to take you in by then. By the way, tell the girls we shan't be all alone, there will be the Moons and two men, including of course

the Marquise de Rabutin and mother. No, of course I don't mean that, but I'm fearfully hurried. Love from FLORA."

At first Jenny wished me to refuse, but I have accepted. (*A pause.*)

THE MARQUISE — And have you no marriages in view for your daughters? I know that in your happy country marriages are made in heaven, but I imagine that in that case English mammas try to be on the side of the angels, eh?

MRS. BUTLER-GREEN (*softening*) — Dear Corisande! What a comfort to be with some one who understands! Of course I am fearfully anxious about my girls. Jane is angry because I have not had them all taught to do something. Such nonsense, you know! I am not quite so poor as all that. (*Lowering her voice*) There was my settlement, that comes to four hundred and ninety a year, and then George is so kind. Oddly enough, he won't let me come and keep house for him; I suppose he thinks it better to remain independent, but he has always helped me, and he is goodness itself to the girls. As to

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marriages—well, you know what Englishmen are like. I cannot make George see that it is his *duty* to provide husbands for his nieces. Things have gone badly somehow. The truth is, Corisande, English girls nowadays care too much or too little about getting married. Mabel and Olive are quite absurdly afraid of getting to be regular old maids—poor dears, they little know (*sighing*) — while Jenny has actually to my knowledge refused two very decent offers, and I daresay she's had others I don't know of. Somehow men always like her. But my poor little Jenny (*sighing*) has been unlucky. I can't go into it now, perhaps it will all come right yet. If only I could settle my two elder girls, but men are so fearfully mercenary nowadays, and I can't fancy either Mabel or Olive married to a poor man. Besides, we don't see many men, rich or poor. My nieces are so selfish, marriage has certainly not improved them. Of course Flora could make all sorts of opportunities, but now she has quite given up asking her cousins when it would be of any use. I assure you I

often feel most discouraged and quite sick of it all !

THE MARQUISE (*patting her hand affectionately*) — Who knows, I may bring you good fortune ! I have the happy hand in dealing with marriages ; I assure you I have settled quite a number of my sons' friends.

MRS. BUTLER-GREEN — Dear Corisande !



III

A DISCREET INDISCRETION



A DISCREET INDISCRETION

LETTER from the MARQUISE CORISANDE DE
RABUTIN to SIR GEORGE CHENIES

99 WHITEHALL TERRACE, S.W.

Thursday.

CHER AMI,

You ask me what I think of your sisters, of their daughters, of the House of Commons, of the Season—in a word, of all your most cherished institutions, ami Georges. As for the sisters, the most serious items dans tout cela, Jane is what she always was. By dint of looking the good soul she is, she has accomplished all that your English dowager wishes to achieve. Her son is a bachelor and is pleased to remain the guest of his mother in his own house, her daughters are both married to unexceptionable country

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gentlemen ; she is, if I mistake not, the happy woman with no history. As to Olivia—why did you not prepare your poor friend for Olivia? Seriously, *mon ami*, we must do something for this sister. Three unmarried daughters, and according to the worthy Jane *sans dot, sans chic, sans everything!* Listen to Jane. “I don’t know what Olivia and her girls would do if it were not for my kind brother George.” Ah, Georges! “Happily he does not show the slightest wish to get married,” she adds. Ah, Georges, Georges!

You will be glad to hear that I have good news of my boys. The new-born is a wonder, so is the English nurse provided by kind Jane ; the young father alone can talk to her. He blesses his mother for having taught him English. He assists at the infant’s *toilette* night and morning, and acts as interpreter for the gorgeous creature—in a word, all goes well. As for my André, he is the best of sons but the most abandoned of subjects, his head still runs on that frivolous doll. We must entice him to this

virtuous country, where, so Jane assures me, married ladies never flirt.

Well, well, au revoir! No, you must not come to London—this time it is I who must come to you. When am I coming? In a few little days; perhaps they will seem over long to your old friend,

CORISANDE.

An indiscretion passe presqu' inaperçu in a postscriptum! In the quite long ago, Georges, you confided to me your intentions of posthumous generosity to Olivia's daughters. You know, dear friend, le bien is so often l'ennemi du mieux. I propose with your permission that you and I should arrange a combination by which the legacy of the future should become the dowry of the present. Olivia informs me that in this matter the English Cœlebs is not so utterly unlike his French brother as you have always taught me to believe!

IV

DOTS AND THE DIFFERENCE

DOTS AND THE DIFFERENCE

EXTRACT from a LETTER addressed by SIR
GEORGE CHENIES to the MARQUISE CORISANDE

. . . . As to Olivia's girls, I have considered your suggestion. Forgive me for not being altogether disinterested in the matter. I may tell myself (may I not?) that the plan, if successful, will bring nearer what you know I have so closely at heart. And yet I have the pain of refusing your kind help, but only so far as concerns the material part of the scheme. Believe me, dear friend, it is impossible that you should help with actual money, nor indeed is it necessary. Perhaps I am old-fashioned, but when I was a young fellow we should have thought it a low thing to regulate our wooings to the scale of a few

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thousand pounds more or less. Still, I know that Olivia takes the view that the dot makes the difference. Well, the long and short of it is that I always meant to leave fifteen or sixteen thousand pounds among Olivia's daughters, and now it shall be as you say, and the legacies of the future shall be turned into the dowries of the present. Of course if my little Jenny finds a husband in a certain quarter—and in that matter I assure you I am quite indifferent to poor Jane's feelings!—her share can go to increase Olive's and Mabel's. But let us keep our own counsel about all this for the present. I fear poor dear Olivia was not intended by nature for a conspirator . . .

V

INVITATIONS

INVITATIONS

THE drawing-room of No. 99 Whitehall Terrace is a room of fine proportions, panelled to the ceiling, and possessing that subtle air of distinction which is conferred by two Adams fireplaces. It is Mrs. Furleigh's conservatism rather than her taste that has saved her from gas, or even electric light. There are a few pictures, all family portraits, but the walls are chiefly occupied by an extraordinary number of old-fashioned mirrors in eccentric horned and antlered frames, the pride of some bygone Furleigh. MRS. WICKHAM is sitting at a small writing-table in the deep embrasure of one of the windows, and she has settled MRS. FURLEIGH in a comfortable chair within easy talking distance. The MARQUISE comes in upon their conversation.

MRS. WICKHAM (*looking round as the Marquise enters the room*)—We're just making out the list of people who are to stop with us when you and mother are at Wickhams-would. Of course it will be quite a family

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party. By the way, I forgot to tell you that I have asked Aunt Olivia and the girls—*(turning to Mrs. Furleigh)* I suppose they won't mind being put in the two porch-rooms, mother? I really can't spare any others, you see we shall be so many; the Moons are coming, and *(with a slight smile,* Jim Walberton of course.

THE MARQUISE *(interested)*—Ah! A prospective suitor for one of your cousins, Flora?

MRS. WICKHAM *(hastily)*—Heavens, no! Jim has always been Rose Moon's property—*en tout bien tout honneur*, of course.

MRS. FURLEIGH *(scandalised)*—My child, do not talk so, Mr. Walberton is such an old friend of the family. Rose is quite devoted to Sir John, Corisande, and she regards Jim as a brother—a dear young brother. Indeed, she told me so herself when I ventured to remonstrate; appearances are so deceitful, and——

MRS. WICKHAM *(hurrying on)*—Then, how about that very semi-detached couple, the Dovemeres, mother? *(Doubtfully)* I would rather have them now than later. It's really

a kindness to ask the poor woman when there's nobody about to make him jealous, and you know Charlie understands how to amuse him and keep him in order. Without having exactly taken the pledge, he is certainly better than he used to be.

MRS. FURLEIGH (*dropping her paper and speaking with unwonted energy*)—When I was a young woman, Flora, a man like Lord Dovemere would never have been allowed to cross the doorstep of a house full of girls.

MRS. WICKHAM (*laughing*)—Dear mother, I assure you your nieces are quite able to take care of themselves. Besides, Lord Dovemere's not such a bad fellow after all. I think he might have been quite a respectable member of society if his wife had been more like other women. I only wish I had the spending of his fifty thousand a year.

MRS. FURLEIGH (*significantly*)—I don't think, my dear, that it is poor Lady Dovemere who spends her husband's money. Mrs. Hatherley gave me a dreadful account of how he treats her.

MRS. WICKHAM (*sharply*)—Well, in any

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case they're coming. We had a delightful time at Dundrummy last autumn, and I happen to know that he wants to come to us just now. He won't interfere with you at all. Charlie will take him off our hands altogether. I wonder whom I can ask in the way of men he won't be jealous of. How about Vere Standish? He's not a bad little sort, and goes about a good deal. I often wonder (*thoughtfully*) how he manages it. I'm always seeing him mentioned in the "Universe." This Mr. Standish (*turning to the Marquise*) is supposed to be an admirer of one of my cousins, so I think I will ask him. It's a long time since I did Aunt Olivia a good turn.

MRS. FURLEIGH (*fondly*)—How kind you are, darling! Always thinking of others, never of yourself.

MRS. WICKHAM (*indifferently*)—Oh, the only man I'd care to ask, for myself I mean, will be at Cowes——

MRS. FURLEIGH (*shaking her head*)—Ah, Corisande, the world has changed since we were young!

THE MARQUISE (*thoughtfully*)—Indeed, yes. And this Mr. Standish, is he a suitable one for Olivia's girls?

MRS. WICKHAM—I should think so! They would be very lucky to get him. Why, he's got fifteen hundred a year, and seems in great request. I should tell you, by the way, that Charlie can't stand him. Men never can, I don't know why exactly. They think him mean, I believe, and really, you know, he is rather near. I remember he told me once that he had set up a valet because he found he was never well looked after the *second* time he stopped at a house. He didn't seem to have an idea how that would strike me.

THE MARQUISE (*quietly*)—And do you think a "near" husband desirable?

MRS. WICKHAM (*staring at her*)—Good heavens, no! Of course not, for myself. But it's different for the Butler-Greens. Anything would do for them. Besides, Olive really does like him, I believe, though I don't suppose there's the slightest chance of its ever coming to anything. Why, only the other day I heard that he had been

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making up to Lady Albinia Guillemard. Such cheek! Still, it isn't likely that he would come down from that lofty height to poor Olive, is it? However, she shall have a week to do the running in. Then, mother, Charlie insists on having Tommy Brook. You know he is a sort of relation of the Wickhams. Poor Tommy, he's had such a piece of luck, he came and consulted us about it last Sunday. Some American millionaire has offered him a thousand a year to bear-lead his son. The millionaire heard the usual stories that are always going about of Tommy's jokes and general cheeriness, and without losing a minute he wired right off to his London agent to secure Tommy. Of course there's another side to it. The young cub is a sort of half-witted savage, and Tommy has found out that he has "chawed up," as he called it, half a dozen tutors already. But as the pay is so good we strongly urged him to take it.

MRS. FURLEIGH (*fretfully*)—I wish you wouldn't ask that young man with me, Flora. I'm sure you won't like him, Corisande, he's the—what is it, Flora?

MRS. WICKHAM (*composedly*)—The champion practical joker of the age, so you see he has a reputation to keep up. But he never does anything very bad at Wickhams would, you know he doesn't, mother. This American business has sobered him a good bit, and I'll make him swear to behave himself this time. He starts for New York on the 10th, and it's only common charity to give him a good send-off, poor fellow. He'll have to be kept up to it, but, as I said to him, such a chance doesn't come twice in a lifetime, and the ready's hard enough to get, honestly too, nowadays.

VI

THE MARQUISE AND JENNY

THE MARQUISE AND JENNY

THE crown and chiefest glory of the gardens at Wickhams-would is without question the rosery, glowing amid a frame of formal hedges of clipped yew. When the rosery was young the fair daughters of the house of Wickham carried its spoil to the Court of Queen Bess, and their brothers puffed in its alleys the strange herb which Sir Walter Raleigh had newly brought from Virginia. It is almost more than Mr. Wickham's politeness can bear to be told, as he is often told, that the site would make an ideal lawn-tennis court. At one end of the rosery is a space of springy old turf fronting a quaint arbour, but the MARQUISE and JENNY, fearing spiders, have established themselves in two basket-chairs. The Marquise is embroidering on a frame with the calm enjoyment which is born of the knowledge that every shade of silk is exactly right, while Jenny, with less satisfaction, is reading a novel.

JENNY—I wish mother had taught us to do fancy work when we were children, I do get so sick of reading. As for the girls, they

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never even open a book. Now I do try to keep up with contemporary literature.

THE MARQUISE — Is that volume "contemporary literature," my dear child?

JENNY—Oh, this is Sarah Grand's new book. Rather deep for me, you know, but I quite agree with a lot she says. After all, life's a beastly thing, isn't it? I feel now as if I didn't care for anything. It makes me quite sick to see the way Mabel and Olive go on. Frankly, don't you rather despise us all, Madame? (*Without waiting for an answer*) Not that we are any worse than the others. It's all very well for Aunt Jane to shake her head at poor mother and tell you that she's a matchmaker manquée. (*With a bitter laugh*) Her daughters were just as bad. I admit she did nothing to help them—why should she? Gerald was always bringing men to the house, such a house too, a lovely old place. Then every one knew that each of my cousins had a fortune of her own. I daresay people tell you that Englishmen don't care for money, but it's an awful lie. I may be very stupid, but I've learnt that. Milton or some great

poet or other put it very neatly when he said to his son, "Don't you marry for money, but go where money is." Aunt Jane would be horrified if any one told her she was a fortune-hunter, but she is—for others.

THE MARQUISE (*looking up*)—Ah, and what is Gerald like, my dear?

JENNY (*reddening*)—Oh, Gerald! Just an ordinary young man. Always killing something. We don't see very much of him now. He's become very grand, goes about a great deal, you know. Aunt Jane is awfully fond of him, but naturally she isn't anxious to see him marry. As for the girls, they are frightfully keen on his making a good marriage. I don't think (*doubtfully*) that they want him to marry money. You see that would do them no good at all. No, they would like a smart sister-in-law—some one several degrees smarter than they are themselves.

THE MARQUISE (*musings*)—"Smart," voilà un mot que j'entends bien souvent.

JENNY (*gloomily*)—Yes, even poor mother wishes to be considered smart, but of course it's

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quite out of the question for us. Money spells smartness nowadays, therefore, if it comes to that, Aunt Jane is certainly smarter than poor mother. I should never be surprised to read in the "Universe" "Mrs. Furleigh, so smart in her widow's cap, etc. etc." (*In a burst of confidence*) I'll tell you something if you won't reveal it.

THE MARQUISE (*amused*)—Yes, my child.

JENNY—I write some of that stuff. You know—lists of people at parties and all that sort of thing.

THE MARQUISE (*horrified*)—My dear Jenny, is it possible?

JENNY (*laughing*)—Yes, indeed I do. I don't send it to the paper direct. It's cooked up a bit, of course. I do laugh when I hear people wondering how the "Universe" gets its stuff. Of course a great deal is sent in by the people themselves. Flora's always sending paragraphs about herself, but they only put them in to fill up when they've got nothing better. You mustn't think I write a word about my own family. That would be playing it too low down. I'll tell you some

one else who sends in that sort of thing—Vere Standish.

THE MARQUISE—But how did you begin that sort of—of—work, Jenny?

JENNY (*candidly*)—Oh, I should never have thought of it myself, but three years ago, when we were at Ostend, I met a Mrs. Butterdale who does nothing else. She was staying with a crowd of smart Americans and we rather chummed up. She told me I could make quite a lot of money by simply sending her lists of people I saw at balls and so on. Of course then I went out much more than I do now. I really did make a good bit for a time.

THE MARQUISE—It is called penny-a-lining, is it not?

JENNY (*proudly*)—More than that! It pans out to about half-a-crown a paragraph, but I have to be fearfully particular about the spelling of the names—as if that mattered (*contemptuously*).

THE MARQUISE (*anxiously*)—And does Oli— does your mother know of this employment of yours?

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JENNY (*dismayed at the very idea*)—Heavens, no! Why, she would be always asking me to put her and the girls in. That would never do. Besides (*importantly*), I have to think of what the public like. I know you are rather shocked, Madame, but you don't know what a comfort it is to feel that one is doing something. If it hadn't been for my writing I think I should have felt inclined to go and hang myself. (*Anxiously*) But it's a dead secret, only one person knows about it, but somehow I thought I would tell you. (*Wistfully*) I wish you would cheer up poor mother, she gets so down sometimes. I feel as if I would give my soul in exchange for a rich young man—oh, not for myself (*laughing*), but for Olive, or rather Mabel. Olive does enjoy her life after a fashion. You know she gets asked about a good lot. The young Duchess of Perthshire sticks to her like a brick, and she always pays two longish visits to Glenalan every year. Mother and I once hoped something would come of it, but now we are content to let things slide. The only

permanent conquest she has ever made there is that fearful being, Vere Standish!

THE MARQUISE (*quietly*)—And why fearful, my dear Jenny?

JENNY (*hastily*)—Oh, I don't know. He's such an awful little snob. And yet, do you know, sometimes I think Olive really does like him—that is, as much as she can like anybody except herself.

THE MARQUISE (*smiling*)—Our dear Olive exemplifies the true saying, *Tous les goûts sont dans la nature*. I think that the sympathy is mutual. Mr. Vere Standish evidently takes pleasure in her agreeable society. But now, as to Mabel, cannot you and I find her a millionaire? I perceive that millionaires are quite the mode.

JENNY (*doubtfully*)—Oh, something much less than a millionaire would do nicely. You know Mabel is truly a good girl. She's awfully interested in poor people and really does slumming sometimes, doesn't just poke at it like some girls. I know the kind of husband she would like—a rich philan-

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thropic widower with some children. You know she's a splendid manager, and she really does like kids, though she always professes to dislike the idea of having any of her own. A ready-made family would suit her splendidly. After all, there are plenty of widowers about, I've refused two myself. (*A pause.*) Why do the wrong women always marry the right men?

THE MARQUISE (*disappointed*) — Then there is no one en vue for Mabel, not even an equivalent to Mr. Vere Standish?

JENNY (*confidentially*) — Well, the real reason why mother and I made up our minds to come here was partly because—well, because we heard in a roundabout way that the Dean of Buntingham was not going abroad just yet. He and Mabel are rather good friends, and though he's a parson he's a very good sort (*eagerly*), he really is. Here they make fun of him, I mean Flora and Rose do. Still, I know he would come over if he knew we were here. He and Mabel were on a Hygienic Doll Distribution Committee. It was just after his wife died,

and at a time when poor Mabel had just had a little—disappointment.

THE MARQUISE — Ah, so they mingled their sorrows?

JENNY (*seriously*)—I suppose so. Anyhow they generally walked home across the Park together. That was just before he was made Dean of Buntingham. Since then he hasn't been much in town, but one of the first times he did come he called and brought photographs of his children. Mother and I thought that a very promising sign, but nothing more has come of it. I'm sure you would like him, for he speaks French splendidly ; he's been a lot in France, I think. If only Flora were at all decent I'd ask her to ask him over to dinner. You see (*reddening as she catches the Marquise's eye fixed curiously on her*), mother and I are tremendous matchmakers.

THE MARQUISE—And you, Jenny?

JENNY (*lightly*)—Oh, I've got no illusions, I've seen too much. I'm going to be the old maid of the family and keep house for Uncle George.

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THE MARQUISE—?

JENNY—Hush, here's Flora, come to say something disagreeable, I'll be bound. I know her face so well.

MRS. WICKHAM (*making her way towards them across the lawn*)—Oh, what am I to do? Mrs. Anstruther has just sent to ask us all over to lunch. We simply can't get out of it, for she leaves me the choice of any day after to-morrow. It's so awkward (*discontentedly*), we're such a crowd.

THE MARQUISE—My dear Flora, I will gladly remain.

MRS. WICKHAM (*impatiently*)—Oh no, of course you must come, and she has specially mentioned the Moons and the Dovemeres. Somehow that woman always knows whom one's got in the house. I suppose she does it through the G.F.S. I'm afraid, Jenny, I shall have to ask you——

JENNY (*quickly*) — My dear Flora, I wouldn't go for the world.

MRS. WICKHAM (*coolly*)—I thought by something she said that Aunt Olivia was quite keen that you girls should lunch at

the Palace. But I'm afraid it can't be managed.

THE MARQUISE (*amiably*)—How interesting, Flora, it will be for me to see the wife of a bishop. It recalls the very primitive Church. I suppose there is also a doyen, is there not?

MRS. WICKHAM—What's that?

THE MARQUISE—Ah, the English has just escaped me. The Patriarch of the Cathedral, I would say. Can you help me, Jenny?

JENNY—Do you mean the Dean, Madame?

THE MARQUISE—Thank you, dear child. Yes, the Dean, of course. And will he also assist at the lunch?

MRS. WICKHAM—The Dean? Oh no! He and the Palace are on quite different stories. But if you'd like to see him we'll have him over to dinner. (*Condescendingly*) He's not half a bad sort. By the way, you all know him rather well, don't you, Jenny?

JENNY (*languidly*)—Mother and he are rather pals, but why have him over?

THE MARQUISE (*staring at her*)—?

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MRS. WICKHAM (*irritably*)—Why not have him? He's less of a blighter than the Bishop, and as I'm obliged to disappoint your mother about the Palace, I may as well please her about the Dean. I shall go in this very instant and find out which evening we can have a little dinner-party.

VII

THE BISHOP'S LUNCH

THE BISHOP'S LUNCH

THE dining-room at the Palace, once the old refectory of the monks, is a room of fine proportions. On the panelled walls hang portraits of Dr. Anstruther's predecessors in the See. Their faces, if one has leisure to examine them in their order, sum up the history of the Church of England—the Tudor bishops wearing the mask of statecraft; the Caroline divines, collegiate, scholarly; the Georgian, courtly men of the world; and so to the commercial age, when piety is seen mingled with practical wisdom. To those who have no eyes for these things, the portraits yield at any rate patches of colour—the flash of an old mitre, the scarlet of a doctor's robes, the burning spot of a sapphire or a ruby ring. Through the deep square-paned windows may be seen, across a little garden, the long nave of the Cathedral clear against the sky. The BISHOP and MRS. ANSTRUTHER sit one at each end of the old black oak dining-table. On the Bishop's right are the DOWAGER LADY BLACKMONT, SIR JOHN MOON, MRS. DUNLOP, MR. VERE STANDISH, MRS. WICKHAM, CANON BOOMER, LADY MOON, and MR. WICKHAM.

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Mrs. Anstruther has on her right LORD DOVEMERE, MRS. BOOMER, MR. TOMMY BROOK, MRS. FURLEIGH, LORD BLACKMONT, the MARQUISE, CAPTAIN ANSTRUTHER, and LADY DOVEMERE.

THE BISHOP (*turning to his left*)—Lady Dovemere, may I introduce my nephew, Captain Anstruther, to you?

LADY DOVEMERE (*her eyes fixed on her plate*)—I think that—we—have—met—before.

THE BISHOP (*genially*)—Oh well, then, that's all right. How small the world is, to be sure. And now, Lady Blackmont, what may I give you? A little salmon?

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MRS. FURLEIGH (*looking earnestly at young Lord Blackmont as he struggles with a large roast chicken*)—Oh, I cannot agree with you. I think the world—society—so much improved since the days when I was a young woman. Every one is so earnest and so kind, so much less selfish than they used to be. Sometimes I think it must be owing to the influence of the Primrose League. I assure you I often feel quite ashamed when

I see how hard many people work for others. Your aunt, for instance——

LORD BLACKMONT (*who has at last winged his bird*)—Oh, well, my aunt managed to have a pretty lively time before she took up her present line, don't you know?

MRS. FURLEIGH (*who does know, glancing apprehensively towards the head of the table*)—She is such a zealous Churchwoman—look at all she has done for the retirement of aged clergymen!

LORD BLACKMONT (*chuckling*)—Yes, I suppose she don't count bishops, though, even when they are as old as our host. All the same, I wonder why he has asked her here to-day. True, she sometimes wears an apron——

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MR. VERE STANDISH (*suavely, to Mrs. Dunlop*)—As you say, ladies and clergymen ought always to ask some man friend to choose their wines. Now, this so-called burgundy——

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CANON BOOMER (*shaking his head*) . . .

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was laid down by St. Roscidus, our first bishop, in the hope, which was unhappily not realised, that the diocese might benefit. Prior to 1650 antiquaries came from the Continent to see it.

LADY MOON (*pensively*)—Of course my feelings about the Cathedral generally are very mixed. You see I was married in it—oh, long before your time, Canon! My husband was then member for Buntingham, and it was thought the affair might be a sort of raree show for those ungrateful townspeople. Apparently they were disappointed. (*A significant silence, not broken by Canon Boomer, who remembers with painful distinctness the prominent part he played in returning Sir John Moon's rival.*)

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MRS. DUNLOP (*lifting her pretty grey eyes to Sir John's good-natured face*)—Oh yes, I am quite a stranger in Buntingham. But every one is so very kind to me (*impulsively*). I am never allowed to feel lonely. No, I do not go up to London often. I am so delighted with Whiteladies. Such a charm-

ing house, rather large for one lonely little woman! Of course London is very delightful. I was in town for a week in June, and Mr. Shepherd—our member, you know—asked me to tea on the terrace of the House of Commons. So kind and thoughtful of him to regard me as a constituent, wasn't it?

SIR JOHN MOON (*gallantly*)—Another pleasure of which Mr. Shepherd has deprived me. Really, I shall soon be compelled to regard your member as my personal enemy!

MRS. DUNLOP (*who does not see the point of his remark*)—You are very kind. Oh yes, Mr. Shepherd, though he is a widower, really does his duty by the town far better than the last member did. You see, (*lowering her voice slightly*) Lady Moon—'sh! I believe she was to be here to-day—very odd sort of woman, you know, not at all interested in the place and the people, and there was an idea that they didn't quite get on together, but (*utterly blind to her neighbour's attempts to speak*) it was the old story, May and December, you know, and she was a perfectly lovely creature, they say.

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LADY BLACKMONT (*in a loud voice*)—Well, Sir John, you must talk to me a little now ; you know I don't bother you as often as when you were in the House. How's Lady Moon? (*Utter collapse of Mrs. Dunlop, who declares that she is feeling faint, and gratefully allows Mr. Vere Standish to pilot her out of the room and to her carriage with as little fuss as possible.*)

LADY DOVEMERE (*speaking very fast and almost in a whisper under cover of the general chatter*)—No, no ! I can't meet you, it's no use ; even before I left town I told you I could not.

CAPTAIN ANSTRUTHER (*reproachfully*)—You promised to write to me.

LADY DOVEMERE (*her eyes filling with tears*)—I thought we had agreed—(*Terrified*) Oh, my husband is looking at us ! oh, do go on eating ! No, talk to the Marquise, she is so nice. (*Tremulously*) Madame, may I present to you a friend of mine, Captain Anstruther ? I think you have heard of him.

THE MARQUISE (*graciously*)—It is I that am honoured, sir, by making your acquaintance.

LADY MOON (*confidentially, to her brother*)—Really, it's quite a comfort to sit next you, dear old thing! I fear you're not looking after your amiable guest opposite, are you? See, he's even lapping up the episcopal sherry now that he can get nothing better.

MR. WICKHAM (*apprehensively*)—Oh, I wish I could get at him! However, if only he holds his tongue he'll scrape through all right!

LADY MOON—Horrible to see him looking at his wife like that, isn't it? Really, of all the marriages made in the other place—oh, do listen, my poor John is being bullied by that old Jezebel. (*Lowering her voice*) She has known how to make the best of both worlds. (*Significantly*) Jeunesse a su, vieillesse a pu. You see she has quite got round the dear old Bishop.

MR. WICKHAM (*who has not been listening*)—I'm sorry I let them ask Dovemere.

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Something's upset him, he looks quite ferocious.

LADY MOON (*curtly*)—Of course you know your own business best, but I think you might draw the line at a man like that.

MR. WICKHAM (*weakly*)—Well, you see Flora's so sorry for his wife?

MRS. ANSTRUTHER (*smilingly to Lord Dovemere*)—I expect you are longing for Scotland and the heather.

LORD DOVEMERE (*looking askance at her*)—Hate Scotland. Have sold my moor. (*Filling up his glass for the tenth time with sherry from the Buntingham wine-merchant, whose vintages are as ardent as his Church principles*) I should be obliged if you would tell me how long Captain—ah—Anstruther is to be stopping about here.

MRS. ANSTRUTHER (*somewhat flustered*)—Our nephew Hugh? Oh, we hope to keep him here till the middle of September. He is our hero, you know. (*Proudly*) He was the only man who got a V.C. in the Nanna Khel campaign, though I happen to know

that great influence was exerted on behalf of one or two others. But he was terribly wounded, poor fellow——

LORD DOVEMERE (*between his teeth*)—Rot, vile rot! Interesting invalid, I know the game! Still (*looking at his hostess uncertainly*), I'm glad I came to this damned lunch!

MRS. ANSTRUTHER (*thinking she must have been mistaken*)—So glad you like it. We always try to make our little gatherings pleasantly informal.

MR. BROOK (*to Mrs. Boomer*) — Yes, the poor dear old Archdeacon is at least my uncle, sometimes I think he must be my great-uncle. We don't always agree, oh no! Just now, for instance, we're not on speaking terms. But I'll forgive him soon.

MRS. BOOMER (*concerned*) — Has he been rude to you?

MR. BROOK (*absently*) — Oh no, quite the other way round. What a jolly old place this is! If I were stopping here (*glancing at the portraits on the walls*) I'd turn all

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those old johnnies upside down. The Bishop would think the Old Gentleman had come here and done it.

MRS. BOOMER (*shocked*) — I'm sure your uncle would never dream of doing such a thing!

MR. BROOK — Oh, no, I don't mean such a near relation as that. (*Giving her up as a bad job, and turning his attention to Mrs. Furleigh*) I expect your nieces are having a good time to-day. Sensible fellow, Walberton, to have stayed at home. Bishops are all very well in their right place, though a refined taste might regard them as somewhat rococo—

MRS. FURLEIGH (*who considers that Mr. Brook ought not to have been placed next her*)—'Sh, 'sh!

MR. BROOK (*undaunted*) — But my motto is "High Toryism, High Churchism, High Farming, and Old Port for ever."

MRS. FURLEIGH (*mollified*) — Dear me, I never heard of such a very long motto. And what is the crest, may I ask?

MR. BROOK (*gravely*)—You mean the coat.

A corlett, gorged and rampant, displaying a chiderdoss, improper.

MRS. FURLEIGH — Oh, I never knew that before. My dear husband was so interested in heraldry. But what sort of a creature is a corlett? I suppose it is a kind of crow.

MR. BROOK (*looking hard at her*) — You may call it so.



VIII

LADY MOON AND THE MARQUISE

LADY MOON AND THE MARQUISE

IN the State Bedroom at Wickhamswood, carved oak-framed mirrors gleam from walls hung with curious old Spanish leather. It is the first room in England to be hung with leather. It is the same leather. The bed is a large four-poster of elaborate workmanship, and in it Charles I. once slept. The MARQUISE, in a pale mauve silk matinée, is writing at an old secretaire placed in one of the three long windows.

THE MARQUISE (*in response to a tap at the door*) — Enter!

LADY MOON (*coming in*) — I thought I would just come in for a few minutes. (*Wandering about the room*) You know, unless we are desperately hard at work—or play—we English are a lazy set of people. Flora never provides any new way of killing time.

THE MARQUISE (*smiling*) — Then come and kill it with me.

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LADY MOON (*looking round*) — This dear, ugly old room! We are not thought good enough to have it when we stay here alone with Charles and Flora. And yet, you know, I always feel that this house is far more mine than my sister-in-law's. I sometimes wonder what would have happened if I hadn't married John. I don't see myself hitting it off with Flora.

THE MARQUISE (*looking at her curiously*) — But you would have married some one else.

LADY MOON (*slowly*) — I mean if I had gone in, as so many girls do now, for a long engagement with the man of my heart. (*A pause.*) Of course French girls are saved all those complications (*meaningly*) before marriage.

THE MARQUISE (*quickly*) — Oh, you must not believe all that our writers tell you. (*With a smile*) *Il y a font de la littérature!* Seriously, Lady Moon, from what my friends tell me I imagine that in England, even after marriage, complications do occasionally arrive. Oh, without doubt it is exceedingly rare, but,

believe me, we are in some matters more philosophical than sentimental. You would be amazed if you could see how many Frenchwomen act on the good advice, "Quand on n'a pas ce qu'on aime, il faut aimer ce qu'on a."

LADY MOON — I suppose that may be translated by a dictum many of us take to heart.

THE MARQUISE — Yes ?

LADY MOON (*looking down*) — "Discretion is the better part of valour." By the way, I wish we could instil that fact into poor Angela Dovemere and her man-of-war! He is so very—very—valorous, and she is very, very indiscreet! (*Musingly*) I wonder if she knew that he was likely to be about. I'm sure Lord Dovemere was very much surprised. I suppose to-morrow he will get a wire necessitating their immediate departure for a cooler clime!

THE MARQUISE (*artlessly*)—Ah! Scotland, I suppose?

LADY MOON—Of course I would not say so to any one, but really, between ourselves,

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I wonder Lord Dovemere doesn't let her go to the bow-wows her own way. If he got a divorce he could marry again literally the next day. Thousands of girls would willingly change places with her even now.

THE MARQUISE (*gently*)—Girls should not be given the terrible responsibility of choice. I will admit to you that when I see how you manage matters here in England I lose my Latin. For we French, who are constantly told by our candid English friends that we are the creatures of impulse, the slaves of sentiment, we realise almost too seriously the gravity of this step which—forgive me for saying it—you dance so lightly in and out.

LADY MOON (*hesitating*)—I fancy you credit us with over much simplicity. English girls are quite capable of looking out for themselves. For instance, Lady Dovemere, though she would probably deny it now, has only herself to thank. She would take him, she was fully warned, no one forced her into it. Now we see the result. No, the girls I

pity are those who fall in love with the wrong man. Only heiresses can afford the luxury nowadays.

THE MARQUISE (*suddenly*)—Is Miss Susan Dunstable in that happy position?

LADY MOON (*reddening slightly*)—My little god-daughter? Yes, though luckily it isn't generally known. She has some hundreds a year, I believe, left her by a grandmother.

THE MARQUISE (*quietly*)—Then I suppose her parents are arranging the affair?

LADY MOON (*sharply*)—What affair, pray?

THE MARQUISE (*looking out of the window*)—Miss Susan's marriage to that agreeable Mr. Walberton. I have watched the case with interest. Of course if it were not so, her mother, and you, dear Lady Moon, who take so kind an interest in the young girl, would never permit these games, these walks, these rides together.

LADY MOON (*quickly*)—Indeed, you have made a great mistake! Jim Walberton is not at all a marrying man. Every one knows

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that quite well, and besides he is nearly twice her age. English girls have to run the gauntlet of that sort of flirtation. I assure you they like it.

THE MARQUISE—Ah, do they? You astonish me. I was quite deceived by those appearances of intimacy. But of course Mr. Walberton is a man of honour. He would scruple to take even the slightest advantage——

LADY MOON—I fear you over-estimate his discretion. Ever since I've known him Jim has always been ready to make love to any pretty girl that came his way. But as to Susan, there's really nothing in it. You know he was down here last winter while I was at Monte Carlo. I expect he was rather thrown on his own resources, and so fell back on the Rectory. That would account for his knowing her so well. Why (*hesitating*)—I'll tell you a secret. Jim Walberton was once very fond of me, ages ago of course, so really I can claim to know something about him!

THE MARQUISE (*persuasively*)—Since that

is so, you must long to see him happy. What better opportunity can present itself? I think that the young girl is perhaps more interested than she knows herself. Dear Lady Moon, let us arrange this little affair in the French fashion, voulez-vous? You have evidently always been this young man's good angel——

LADY MOON—I don't know about that.

THE MARQUISE—Crown your work by choosing him a wife. I assure you I feel quite interested in these young people; they are so often together under my windows and I hear their—what do you call it?—prattle-prattle.

IX

LADY MOON
AND MR. WALBERTON

LADY MOON AND MR. WALBERTON

THE general morning-room at Wickhamswould is a delightfully untidy place, which also contrives to be comfortable, as the perpetual presence of two fat tabby cats sufficiently testifies. The centre table is littered with old illustrated papers, Bradshaw, and two or three local guide-books, while the sole bookcase contains a miscellaneous collection of railway novels and volumes of the Badminton Library, all more or less the worse for wear. The chairs are long, wide, shallow constructions of no particular period, matches and ash-trays are dotted about, and the walls are covered with sporting prints, including a coloured fancy sketch of Heenan v. Sayers. In one place room has been found for a startlingly impressionist poster, representing "Poppy and her Trainer."

LADY MOON (*sitting at a Louis Quinze writing-table and sealing a note with bright blue sealing-wax*)—There! That's done! You needn't look so astonished, Jim, the Marquise and I have sworn eternal friendship,

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and imitation being the, you know what—Jim! you're not listening to me one bit. You needn't look out so persistently, Susan's driving her father to Buntingham this morning.

MR. WALBERTON—?

LADY MOON (*meaningly*)—Yes, my dear boy. I've seen it coming on. A sharp attack this time, eh?

MR. WALBERTON (*doggedly*)—Go on, laugh at me, you always do. I suppose I've a right——

LADY MOON (*bitterly*)—To make my poor little god-daughter grow fond of you, and then ride, or rather “mote,” away. Yes, I suppose you have a right to do so according to your strange code of honour. (*Then, changing her tone as she sees him moving unobtrusively towards the door*) No, Jim, though I know you find it hard to believe, I do occasionally try to do my friends a good turn. Would it please you to learn that little Susan is in a small way an heiress?

MR. WALBERTON (*coming back to her and speaking with considerable agitation*)—

Lady Moon—Rose! This is no laughing matter!

LADY MOON (*coolly*)—I should think not, indeed! Money never is. Yes, I believe there really was something left by old James's stepmother, of all people in the world. Mind you, I don't know the exact figure.

MR. WALBERTON (*sulkily*)—Oh, I know! A hundred a year.

LADY MOON (*smiling*)—Really, you are not very romantic.

MR. WALBERTON (*earnestly*)—Look here, Rose, I won't beat about the bush with you. You know how I'm situated—you know how it's always been——

LADY MOON (*sighing*)—Oh yes, go on.

MR. WALBERTON (*in a low tone*)—I thought it all out yesterday. We might manage on, well, say on seven hundred a year? (*looking at her expectantly*).

LADY MOON (*drily*)—Oh, so it's already come to "we."

MR. WALBERTON (*heedless of the interruption*)—You see I've my allowance of two hundred, I expect father would make it three,

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so if she's anything like ten thousand pounds, eh, Rose?

LADY MOON (*making a rapid calculation*)—Pooh, you can't get a safe four per cent nowadays, and as for the City——

MR. WALBERTON (*hastily*)—No, thank you! I'm not taking any. I have had enough of that sort of thing.

LADY MOON (*good-naturedly*)—Well, I won't keep you in suspense. I believe that Susan, apart from the comfortable little sum she is sure to get ultimately—only parsons do live longer than other people, I fear—actually possesses at the present moment something like seven hundred a year.

MR. WALBERTON (*despondently*)—Too much, my dear Rose. I shan't be considered good enough.

LADY MOON (*impatiently*)—Of course, if you're not sure of the girl——

MR. WALBERTON—?

LADY MOON—Well, you ought to be a fair judge by this time. However, I've arranged to go there after lunch and see the good people. I shall soon find out from

Mary how the land lies. But, Jim (*seriously*), you must promise me one thing, if there's been any mistake you must get a wire to-morrow morning and be off—for good—by lunch, eh?

MR. WALBERTON—Well, I don't see——

LADY MOON (*sharply*)—But I do. No nonsense, mind! It isn't fair, I won't have it; she's my god-child and I'm bound to protect her.

MR. WALBERTON (*blankly*)—But I say, you don't think there is any doubt, do you?

LADY MOON (*lightly*)—No, I don't; I shouldn't have raised your hopes if I hadn't felt pretty certain of my facts. Why, you look quite flushed—I do believe the Marquise was right after all.

MR. WALBERTON—Eh, what do you mean, Rose? I won't have my private affairs discussed.

LADY MOON (*laughing*)—Ah, ah, ah! They do these things better in France. You'll never know how much you owe to the kind Marquise.

X

A NEW IDEA

A NEW IDEA

HALF-WAY up a cleft in the great rolling sweep of a Kentish down, on a broad plateau, sits the ancient village of Wickhamswold. The church, built of flints with stone dressings and restored to suit the diocesan architect's idea of what fifteenth century work ought to be, resembles a blue chicken under the wing of an immense motherly-looking rectory. In addition to the usual smooth-shaven tennis and croquet lawns, the rectory garden possesses a belt of curious foreign-looking shrubs and saplings. Under a large horse-chestnut sits MRS. DUNSTABLE, the Rector's wife, almost as smiling and contented as the landscape, on which she would no doubt be looking if she had not unfortunately dropped a stitch. "Knit one, pearl one, knit two together," an eavesdropper might catch. Looking up, she sees LADY MOON coming towards her, and rises with a smile of greeting.

MRS. DUNSTABLE (*looking round her anxiously*)—Susan! Where are you, child? My dear Rose, how kind of you to leave all

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your gay friends. I can't think where that child has gone to——

LADY MOON (*quickly*)—Leave her alone, Mary. I've come to have a chat with *you* to-day. It seems such an age since we really had a good talk. Of course I can understand that you don't care to come up to the house with all that crew about, and I assure you I see plenty of Susan there. Of course I do feel bound to look after the young thing a little. (*Sighing*) But one never sees very far, does one? Still, she seems a nice girl. She'll make a good wife for some lucky man some day, eh, Mary?

MRS. DUNSTABLE (*cheerfully*)—Oh, well, we're not in any hurry, you know. Our one ewe-lamb. I don't know what her father would do without her. Only the other day he was saying to Mr. Walberton——

LADY MOON (*sharply*)—Ah, you see a good deal of him I expect.

MRS. DUNSTABLE—Yes, he is immensely interested in the Rector's passion for forestry, and he's getting from one of his Indian friends a most curious little tree which the

Rector thinks will do capitally in the old greenhouse. We consider Mr. Walberton a very pleasant man—a little idle, perhaps, eh? I used to think at one time—oh, a long time ago, when we were all girls—that he had rather a liking, a penchant, as the Marquise would say, for you——

LADY MOON—My dear Mary! What an absurd idea! Why, he's years younger than I am. He's much more likely to have a fancy for our little Susan.

MRS. DUNSTABLE (*startled*)—Oh no! Susan is quite a child. I should be sorry if such an idea entered her head, or any one else's, for the matter of that. Oh no! Susan's fate will be very different.

LADY MOON—I suppose you will require a bishop at least. Poor Jim comes of very good people. He's quite likely to come in for the baronetcy some day.

MRS. DUNSTABLE—My dear Rose, I don't like those sort of jokes. Neither James nor I approve of very early marriages.

LADY MOON (*changing her tone*)—Listen, Mary. I have heard—of course it may be

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all a hum—that your girl has a very fair fortune. I was told thirty thousand pounds.

MRS. DUNSTABLE (*gasping*)—And we have been so careful to prevent anything coming out! Who could have told you?

LADY MOON (*shortly*)—Don't be silly, people always know those sort of things. I suppose that the thirty thou' is really fifteen, eh?

MRS. DUNSTABLE (*still bewildered*)—Oh, more than that, Rose. But who could have told you? Surely James——

LADY MOON—What does it matter? Now, the point is this, if the oof is really there——

MRS. DUNSTABLE—Oof, oof, what's that?

LADY MOON—The money, Susan's fortune, my dear girl. If, as I say, there's anything like twenty thousand pounds, you had much better let the child marry Jim. He's a thoroughly good fellow, take my word. If you won't take mine, take Sir John's for it. Otherwise Susan will become the prey of some clodhopper on the look-out for a fortune. Now, Jim (*sighing*)—Jim really does like her, and I fancy, in fact there's no doubt

about it, that she likes him. How could she help it? He does make love so beautifully, Mary. I remember—it was long ago—hearing of a girl who had given up Goodwood to spend a few days more with Jim in a dull Yorkshire country house, where there was nothing to do but to eat strawberries. Of course we—I mean she was exceedingly silly.

MRS. DUNSTABLE (*shocked*)—I'm sure Susan would never think of doing such a thing. Besides, she hasn't seen anything of him. How can she like him?

LADY MOON—The less you see of some people the more you like them. No, of course I don't mean that, but you say such absurd things. Why, they've been together morning, noon, and—oh well, she's always back here to dinner, isn't she?

MRS. DUNSTABLE (*slowly*)—He has been down sometimes after dinner. You know we are late people.

LADY MOON—You see, I told you so. Well, there's no doubt about his having prospects, very good ones too. Of course

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the General is still well and hearty—unfortunately.

MRS. DUNSTABLE (*much shocked*)—Rose! Is it likely we should wish our son-in-law's father to die soon? What a revolting idea!

LADY MOON (*staring at her*)—What rot, perfectly natural. However, as I say, in time he is bound to come in for Grantham, and meanwhile he and Susan could exist very comfortably on her little income and his little allowance. Well, I expect he'll be coming to see the Rector presently. Ta, ta, my dear. What match-makers we are! I shouldn't have believed it of you, Mary! (*Rising from the low basket-chair*) Of course I shan't mention the matter—yet.

MRS. DUNSTABLE (*in an agony*)—Rose, what do you mean? I must earnestly request you not to tell any one—I mean not to spread further any rumours as to Susan's fortune.

LADY MOON (*pointing to a distant couple walking slowly up the glebe fields*)—Oh, you sly woman! I believe you arranged it all. The Marquise has quite corrupted you. A

nice mamma-in-law you'll make! I don't envy Jim. To think that I should come to learn worldly wisdom of you! I really must be going. (*With sudden seriousness*) My dear Mary, nothing could be more ideal. Is it likely that I should approve of anything that would not turn out for my god-daughter's happiness? As you have asked my advice, I feel bound to give it you, dear. Our little Susan will escape many dangers by an early marriage. I married late myself, you remember. (*Walking quickly to the gate*) Not another word—I quite understand. By the way, Flora told me to ask you all over to lunch to-morrow after church, but your confidences quite drove everything out of my head. Don't keep Jim too long, he's wanted at the house—in fact I was sent to look after him. However, Susan is doing that. Love's young dream, eh, Mary? So much better to get it over quite young, though to be sure some people want constantly inoculating, and even then they catch it again.

MR. JAMES WALBERTON (*overtaking Lady*

Moon)—Don't walk so fast, there's a good girl! Well—well—well?

LADY MOON (*smiling up at him*)—I was walking quite slowly. How unfair you are! Of course if you linger about making love to pretty girls——

MR. WALBERTON (*roughly*)—Is it all right? Tell me at once. You've no right to keep me in suspense.

LADY MOON (*coolly*)—Indeed? Haven't I? How ungrateful men are! Well—my dear Jim, I've settled everything. There's twenty thousand pounds and—my blessing. Only you don't care for the latter, I suppose. The gate's open, you've only got to walk through. The Rector will be quite ready to receive you in his study this evening.

MR. WALBERTON (*suddenly bending down and kissing her*)—You're an angel, Rose!

LADY MOON (*trying to laugh*)—You do like her then, after all. I wonder if you ever—ever liked me, Jim?

MR. WALBERTON—Why do you talk like that? You know I did—I mean you know I do.

LADY MOON (*sadly*)—Yes, I do know you did and I do know you do. (*Pulling herself together with an effort*) I won't bore you by asking you to be kind to the little girl, Jim. I know you'll be that, besides (*smiling up at him*) I don't much care whether you are or not. No, don't look sulky, of course I care—isn't she my god-child? But, putting nonsense aside, you will have to be sensible about the money. (*Anxiously*) Don't be eager about it—I mean, don't appear to be eager about it. It's there, right enough. I suppose there's no doubt about the girl, eh?

MR. WALBERTON—?

LADY MOON (*piqued*)—What nonsense! You've always told me all about your love affairs. Is she very much—er—mashed?

MR. WALBERTON (*revolted*)—Don't talk about her, please.

LADY MOON—Oh, very well! A moment ago we were kissing kind, and now——

MR. WALBERTON (*quickly*)—I wouldn't mind telling her that I kissed you just now.

LADY MOON—I— (*Then, changing her mind*) That will not be necessary, I fancy.

Don't let us quarrel, my dear Jim. Of course you are quite right not to talk about the future Mrs. Jim. I only want to ask you one question—see, we shall be at the door in a moment—did you ever send any ambassador to—to *my* mamma?

SIR JOHN MOON (*suddenly appearing on one side*)—Well, my dear, are they coming? I should be glad to see old Dunstable again, though he always was a serious sort of a chap.

LADY MOON (*gaily*)—Oh yes, John, they're coming all right. Do go away, Jim, I've got something private to say to my old man (*passing her hand through Sir John's arm*). Listen, I think something is going to be fixed up between little Susan, my god-child you know, and poor Jim Walberton. Do give him a good character if the parson asks you anything about him, there's a good man. The girl has a nice little fortune, and marriage (*earnestly*) would be the making of Jim.

XI

HOLDING A SKEIN

HOLDING A SKEIN

THE MARQUISE is embroidering alone in the great drawing-room at Wickhamswood. She admires the long white room with its First Empire furniture, pictures few and good, cabinets of china, and faded miniatures of by-gone beauties. Through the wide-open windows she can see the lawn, bordered with flower-beds, and the great trees in the park beyond.

MR. VERE STANDISH (*coming in hurriedly*)—Oh, Madame, I think I must have left my cigarette case—ah, here it is! But do you not find it dull all by yourself?

THE MARQUISE (*wondering how to turn the conversation to her liking*)—I shall not find it at all dull if you will talk to me (*making room for him on the settee by her side*).

MR. STANDISH (*flattered*)—I fear you will

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find me an infliction after your countrymen, who are such brilliant talkers. Well, it is cool here, at any rate.

THE MARQUISE—For my part I love this room, and I wish all our party passed more time here.

MR. STANDISH—It is a fine room certainly, but every one seems to collect in the hall or the billiard-room. Nowadays in the country people only care to go to the drawing-room after dinner.

THE MARQUISE (*holding up several skeins of pink silk*)—Mr. Standish, will you help an old lady through a difficulty? You have such smooth white hands—I always remark hands——

MR. STANDISH (*gallantly*)—Certainly, with the greatest pleasure. I will sit at your feet and hold each skein while you wind. Nowadays so few women care for the sweet soft femininities. You wonder that Englishmen remain single. Behold the reason! (*trying to wave his imprisoned hands towards a group of girls who are cycling up to the house*). Man is a sentimental creature, my dear

MARQUISE. No doubt you are aware of that?

THE MARQUISE (*looking at him with a smile*)—That fact has not escaped my observation.

MR. STANDISH (*gloomily*)—How can sentiment be fed or fanned into life by that thing? Give me the spinning-wheel. But you see I have a weak heart, cycling is quite out of the question for me.

THE MARQUISE (*absently*)—I notice that two of the Misses Butler-Green do not bicycle. You have doubtless converted them?

MR. STANDISH—Oh no! I fancy (*confidentially*) that they can't afford it.

THE MARQUISE (*quietly*)—You surprise me. I understand that each has a modest fortune.

MR. STANDISH (*earnestly*)—Oh dear no, that is quite a mistake! I made it my business to inquire. It is always better to know these things. There is absolutely nothing but the trifle they will ultimately inherit from their mother.

THE MARQUISE (*plunging a little*)—Believe

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me, I am sure that there is, let me see—yes, two hundred thousand francs, that is eight thousand pounds, is it not? I have it on unimpeachable authority. Oh, they will make excellent wives. Mabel is a very pleasant girl——

MR. STANDISH (*hesitating*)—And Miss Olive? There's no nonsense about her, is there? I met her at Glenalan last year. She is quite intimate with the young Duchess.

THE MARQUISE (*looking at him thoughtfully*)—Such relations are very useful, especially after marriage——

MR. STANDISH (*startled*)—Bless me, are the Butler-Greens related to the Duchess?

THE MARQUISE—Not that I know of. I meant, dear Mr. Standish, that relations in the French sense are often far truer friends than cousins and aunts.

MR. STANDISH (*ruefully*)—That's very true. Sir Hamilton Standish, the head of our family, you know, cuts me dead now, but I'll be even with him yet.

THE MARQUISE (*edging away a little*)—That is indeed deplorable. (*Inconsequently*)

And yet I am persuaded that, given a certain type of woman, you would make a very good husband as husbands go (*looking at him doubtfully*).

MR. STANDISH (*delighted*)—Praise from you, Marquise, is praise indeed! The moment I saw you I knew that we should be friends.

THE MARQUISE — ?

MR. STANDISH (*smiling*) — And what sort of woman, or rather girl, do you think would appr— would make me a good wife? Who knows? I may be guided by your counsels.

THE MARQUISE (*to herself*) — Je l'espère bien, mon p'tit bonhomme. (*Aloud*) You put a great responsibility on me, but I will endeavour to answer your question. First—forgive my looking at the matter from a French point of view—there is the mother-in-law.

MR. STANDISH (*thoughtfully*) — There are so few orphans about. You see they get snapped up—especially if there's any fortune.

THE MARQUISE (*laughing*) — But believe me, dear Mr. Standish, a mother-in-law has

her benefit. Why, in France we call her the handsome-mother. If she is a woman of the world she can greatly assist her children.

MR. STANDISH—Well, there is something in that, certainly.

THE MARQUISE—Your wife should be, to my apprehension, no mere—what shall we say?—chit (*repeating the word with some satisfaction*). No, what we want for you is a young lady who knows something of the world, who can—what is that excellent expression?—“make herself pleasant.” It is a gift, an absolute gift. All have it not. Often your very pretty woman is quite without it. Then again, Mrs. Vere Standish—

MR. STANDISH—Dear me, you quite made me start! But pray go on!

THE MARQUISE—Mrs. Vere Standish, I repeat, must be well related. That is important. What good even a wealthy Mrs. Dunlop to you? Oh yes, I have heard something of what occurred when you acted as Perseus to the bourgeoisie Andromeda! A little bird has also told me that you have had news of her—that you have called——

MR. STANDISH (*reddening*)—Oh, well——

THE MARQUISE (*earnestly*)—But you do not know that she is in train of becoming the Shepherdess — chut, I should say Mrs. Shepherd, M.P. It is so, I fear—nay, dear Mr. Standish, I do not fear. It will be for you an escape. What would you do with a vulgarian? Your tastes are simple and worldly. Would money compensate you for banishment from a circle which you adorn?

MR. STANDISH (*feebly*)—I think you are right. Still, I believe you are mistaken about Mrs. Dunlop. She assures me——

THE MARQUISE—Ah, no, a beer-maker's widow is not for you! Do not fall into the opposite extreme. After having aspired——

MR. STANDISH—Good heavens, who told you——

THE MARQUISE (*composedly*)—There is no harm in aspiring, but——

MR. STANDISH (*bitterly*)—Yes, it is a relief to me to unburden my soul. Your informant was right, Marquise, I did aspire. Lady Albinia Guillemard gave me every

reason to suppose—women are very cruel, but little did I think she would have given me aw—betrayed my confidence.

THE MARQUISE (*soothingly*)—You are reserved for a happier fate. Courage!

MR. STANDISH (*recovering himself with an effort*)—But pray go on describing the ideal She, dear lady. So far I am quite delighted with her!

THE MARQUISE—There is nothing to add. She must, of course, have a nice little dot—enough to pay all her own expenses. You have, I think, a charming country house of your own?

MR. STANDISH (*modestly*)—Oh, quite a cottage! Large enough for two, though. It's in a charming part of the world—Somerset, you know. The people are rather slow, but through my mother I am connected with most of the—er—good people down there. I'm getting on (*shaking his head*). Thirty-three next March, and upon my word I don't enjoy going about as much as I used to do. Of course a week at Glenalan or a fortnight with the Grand Duke of Marienbad is very

jolly, still there's no place like home, and servants are such a bore. (*Confidentially*) I'm frightfully pillaged. Of course they don't take me in, I have that consolation. But I've often thought—lately, I mean—that it would almost pay me to keep a wife!

THE MARQUISE (*hastily*)—Now I can proceed with my embroidery. A thousand thanks, dear Mr. Standish, for your kind help. I have quite enjoyed our little conversation. Remember, the first visit after the honeymoon must be to me. You were saying yesterday that you had never encountered our Princes during their long exile in your hospitable land. My son Paul was in the same regiment with the Duc de Fontainebleau. The Prince told me that he is very fond of England, and it will be a pleasure for him to make your acquaintance—(*smiling*) and that of your bride!

XII

THE TROUBLES OF A
CHÂTELAINE

THE TROUBLES OF A CHÂTELAINNE

THE MARQUISE, MRS. FURLEIGH, LADY MOON, and MRS. WICKHAM have collected in the morning-room, which a watchful footman has hastily made a trifle less untidy. It is that agreeable moment of the day when lunch is a memory and dinner an anticipation.

MRS. WICKHAM—Well, I suppose I may as well ring for tea. The girls have gone into Buntingham, and Jim Walberton is at the Rectory—as usual. I wonder, by the way, what Lady Dovemere did with herself after lunch. She isn't upstairs, and——

LADY MOON—She's gone off by herself for a walk round the park.

MRS. WICKHAM (*fretfully*)—My dear Rosie, I wish you would say right out what you mean.

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LADY MOON (*shortly*)—I never mean anything.

MRS. WICKHAM—In any case I do wish the Dovemeres would go away. Charlie heard him rowing her again this morning, and he says he won't stand it much longer——

MRS. FURLEIGH (*interested*) — But I suppose he can't do anything?

MRS. WICKHAM (*crossly*)—Of course not, mother. One can't knock a man down in one's own house simply because he swears at his wife, though I do think that sort of language should be reserved for home use.

MRS. FURLEIGH (*bewildered*) — But I thought you said that Lord Dovemere couldn't stand the way that misguided young woman goes on. I have always had a great prejudice against him, but now that I understand the true facts of the case——

CHORUS—What facts?

MRS. FURLEIGH (*lowering her voice*)—Her most unbecoming conduct with that young officer—a bishop's nephew, too.

LADY MOON (*drily*)—Curious taste, isn't

it, when she's had so much choice—so much of that pity which is first cousin to love, I mean. She's such a pretty creature. (*Candidly*) For my part, I've often wondered why they didn't run away and have done with it. I suppose there's a lack of money—as usual. She hadn't a sou, you know.

MRS. WICKHAM (*significantly*)—I'm beginning to think that won't stop them much longer. Charlie would certainly contribute his mite to an Elopement Fund.

MRS. FURLEIGH—Oh!!

MRS. WICKHAM—Well, you needn't look so shocked, mother. One must take the world as it is. Of course, when you were young (*scornfully*) it was the thing to be on good terms with one's husband even if he beat you black and blue.

LADY MOON (*hastily*)—But to return to the Dovemere affair. Have you any reason, Flora, to suppose that they are—er—in communication with one another?

MRS. WICKHAM (*hesitating*)—Yes, to tell the truth, I have; and I only hope to goodness nothing will happen here.

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MRS. FURLEIGH—And my dear mother was so intimate with her grandmother!

THE MARQUISE (*thoughtfully*)—Life is made very difficult to some of us poor women. Marriage is certainly a state of grace, not a state of nature.

MRS. FURLEIGH (*surprised*)—Oh, Corisande, what a strange thing to say! I have always observed that a woman can generally manage even a most difficult husband if only she knows how to do it.

LADY MOON (*glancing at the Marquise*)—That never struck me before, but now I see how true it is.

MRS. WICKHAM (*sharply*)—Well, Rose, you certainly prove mother's contention. We never used to think Sir John very manageable, and yet he's quite in your pocket!

LADY MOON—You put things so very neatly, dear. Now we all thought my brother singularly tractable, and yet—

THE MARQUISE (*earnestly*)—Can nothing be attempted to prevent the affair from proceeding to a lamentable conclusion?

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MRS. WICKHAM—No, I'm afraid she's really desperate. Charlie says she ought to have run away long ago—by herself of course he means. He says that every one would have taken her part. I did just say a word to her the other day, but she didn't take it at all well. (*Impartially*) She's a silly sort of woman. I don't much care what she does or where she goes to as long as she doesn't start from here!

LADY MOON (*laughing*)—Well, you're frank about it, at any rate. Now I like the poor foolish creature, but upon my word I shouldn't know what advice to give her if she asked me for any, which to be sure isn't likely. Yet I'm positive they would be better apart.

MRS. FURLEIGH (*dubiously*)—I suppose she has done her best to reform him?

THE MARQUISE (*sarcastically*)—Les grands et les petits moyens?

MRS. FURLEIGH (*impressively*)—No trouble would be too great to bring about such a result. It's such a very serious thing for a woman to leave her husband, isn't it,

Corisande? I've always understood that such a step should never be taken excepting under the best legal advice. Perhaps if I were to give poor Lady Dovemere a note to Mr. Fuffelow, of Bedford Row, he might help her to decide. He has been so kind and sensible, Corisande, about my investments, and he drew up all my daughters' marriage settlements.

MRS. WICKHAM (*irritably*)—Oh yes, mother, all right. If you really want to get a letter posted to Gerald I'm afraid you must go and finish it. I'll have some tea sent up to you. *[Exit Mrs. Furleigh.]*

MRS. WICKHAM (*turning to the others*)—I'm awfully worried about it all. Maunders, my maid you know, tells me they meet every day. I daresay they're together now. All the servants have seen them. I do think she owes it to me not to compromise herself so absurdly—here, I mean. Luckily their behaviour seems to be quite proper, but they have what Maunders calls long arguments, so I suppose he's urging her to take the great plunge.

LADY MOON (*shrugging her shoulders*)—Really, Flora, if you take what a servant says——

MRS. WICKHAM (*angrily*)—I am simply telling you what I hear, and besides, Maunders isn't an ordinary servant, she's so superior, the daughter of a Surveyor of Taxes, whatever that may be. I assure you I live in a perfect terror of what may happen next. Lord Dovemere would certainly kill her if he found out she was meeting that man.

LADY MOON (*shortly*)—Then he's an unreasonable brute and ought to be locked up.

THE MARQUISE (*smiling*)—The mad-houses would have to be enlarged. Who says man says jealous.

MRS. WICKHAM—And then I'm so worried about Aunt Olivia. I never knew such an unreasonable woman. She actually wants Charlie to sound Vere Standish as to his intentions with regard to Olive! Did you ever hear of anything more mad? What a warning it is to keep to the good old rule of doing nothing for one's relations! Charlie

says he wouldn't mind so much if it was any one but Vere Standish, but he simply won't risk a scene with a man like that to oblige Aunt Olivia.

LADY MOON (*admiringly*)—She certainly is a plucky old campaigner! I wonder she don't attack him herself!

MRS. WICKHAM (*fretfully*)—She seems to think that Charlie would be more persuasive. I must say I shouldn't care to meet Aunt Olivia on the war-path, brandishing a wreath of orange-blossoms in one hand and a blank form of marriage settlement in the other. Girls are queer beings.

THE MARQUISE—Is it so unnatural that they should wish to enter the state which you adorn, my dear Flora?

MRS. WICKHAM—Oh, I don't blame them for wanting to get married, but only for showing that they do. And really Aunt Olivia is quite absurd about it. I can't force men to propose to my cousins!

LADY MOON (*significantly*)—In some cases it is easier to prevent a proposal, eh, Flora?

MRS. WICKHAM (*coolly*)—Well, Rose, I admit I should be very sorry if Gerald ever thought seriously of Jenny. Poor plain little thing! (*Regretfully*) My brother has such good taste in most things. For instance, he only likes to meet pretty married women.

LADY MOON—Well— (*Then, checking herself*) Of course there's no accounting for tastes. At all events Olive Butler-Green would make Vere Standish an excellent wife. But he is a horrid finicking little creature! I know he likes her, he's always following her about when he thinks her mamma's out of the way. I'm sure they spend more than half the day together.

MRS. WICKHAM—Yes, that's what makes Aunt Olivia so angry. She says he ought to be brought to book, but if Olive can't do it herself I fear no one else can.

LADY MOON (*sententiously*)—Isn't it odd that even the stupidest of men can put a clever woman up a tree if only she likes him—and if she has no big brother?

MRS. WICKHAM.—Oh, come! The modern

host has enough to do to keep his guests amused without playing the heavy father.

LADY MOON—H'm, well, at any rate I agree with you that it would do no good, and might perhaps upset the apple-cart.

THE MARQUISE—What a good expression! A reference, I imagine, to that unfortunate incident in the Garden of Eden?

XIII
AFTER DINNER

AFTER DINNER

I. IN THE DRAWING-ROOM

THE MARQUISE is in a high pink silk dress, covered with black lace, a few fine diamonds ; MRS. WICKHAM in a pretty, very décolleté white chiffon gown, which has seen better days ; LADY DOVEMERE looking lovely in a simple little yellow satin frock ; while MRS. FURLEIGH, MRS. BUTLER-GREEN, MRS. DUNSTABLE, and JENNY are each clad in the unbecoming useful black dinner-dress of the modern type.

MRS. FURLEIGH—I really think the Dean is very much improved. I expect that having been so much with the dear Bishop has made a great difference to his—his tone (*vaguely*). I wonder if his father was really a tallow-chandler (*looking round her inquiringly*). I thought those sort of people were always dissenters.

MRS. WICKHAM—Oh no, mother. I believe his father was a gasfitter in Nottingham.

MRS. FURLEIGH (*obviously much relieved*)—Then I suppose he was born into the Church.

JENNY (*flippantly*)—Pray, what religion is left for the electric light people? Christian science, I suppose.

MRS. BUTLER-GREEN (*hastily*)—Don't be so silly, my dear. I think the Dean is a great acquisition to the neighbourhood. He was very popular at Kensington.

THE MARQUISE (*chiming in*)—A most agreeable and cultivated person.

MRS. WICKHAM—Oh yes, that he is, certainly. I believe he became, before poor Lady Louisa died, quite to the manner wed. But at the time she married him I've heard he was quite dreadful. A fine preacher and so on, but too awfully bumptious and self-assertive. Of course he owes the Deanery to his brother-in-law. He certainly did very well for himself—the first time. I fancy he finds it rather pleasant to be a widower. How devoted he is to those horrid children of his!

MRS. FURLEIGH (*severely*)—I never met a

runder little boy. He asked me if I wore—really I cannot tell you what he asked me. I should pity any girl who married that child's father.

THE MARQUISE (*earnestly*)—But if she was a good, kind person, he would become—what shall I say?—quite a little gentleman.

MRS. FURLEIGH—I think little boys are always disagreeable. My Gerald was certainly a very nice child, but then he was quite an exception. I never saw any child I thought at all comparable to him.

MRS. BUTLER-GREEN—How strange!

MRS. DUNSTABLE (*hastily*)—Good people all, I wish you would give me a little advice about my Susan's trousseau. I don't want to get many things, but I want what I do get to be nice. You know Jim's sisters are very smart, and I shouldn't like my girl to look like a little country bumpkin among them.

LADY DOVEMERE (*looking up eagerly*)—Oh, do let me give you some Paris addresses!

MRS. FURLEIGH (*authoritatively*)—If you go to Paris, there's no one like Worth. Of course he's very dear. I remember getting

a grey cashmere dress there just before Flora came out. It cost twenty-four pounds (*sighing*), but then the linings were so good. And it wore for ever—in fact I was still wearing it when Flora was married.

MRS. WICKHAM (*impatiently*)—Oh no, don't go to Worth, he's quite gone out. If you do go to Paris for Susan's things you might try Flap; then if I think Susan's frocks look all right, I'll get my next drawing-room dress there.

MRS. DUNSTABLE (*mildly*)—Oh, but I would rather go to some one about whom there is no doubt at all. You see Susan will only be married once in her life.

MRS. WICKHAM (*absently*)—I'm not so sure about that—I mean as to whether one can really put one's trust in any dressmaker or tailor.

MRS. FURLEIGH (*anxiously*)—I hope, my dear, you will get her a good black dinner-dress. There's nothing so useful, (*turning to Mrs. Butler-Green*) is there, Olivia? Why, I wore that dress you are wearing for nearly six years, and yet it looks quite nice, even

now, doesn't it? Of course it was very good.

THE MARQUISE (*raising her voice slightly*)—Well, this lace that I wear to-night was really in my daughter-in-law's corbeille, but it has been exceedingly useful to me.

CHORUS—Lace is always so useful and it always looks nice.

MRS. WICKHAM—What do you think, Rose? You don't seem keen about Susan's trousseau.

LADY MOON (*looking up from her book*)—Oh, talking about dear little Susan's trousseau, are you? I hope, Mary, that you will patronise my pet lingère. She takes so much trouble, fits every garment as carefully as if it was a riding-habit, and as for her petticoats——

MRS. FURLEIGH (*impressively*)—The Army and Navy Stores will provide you with a complete trousseau of underlinen for as little as five pounds. If I were you, Mary, I should write for their list to-morrow. Even if you don't get anything there, it will be such a help to you.

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LADY DOVEMERE (*dreamily*)—She will be so dreadfully tired with all those fittings. I think (*with sudden passion*) the trousseau and all that sort of thing is the most hateful part of the whole hateful business. (*Wanders off to the other end of the room where the girls are grouped round the piano.*)

MRS. FURLEIGH (*aside to the Marquise*)—Dear me, this is very sad. (*Soothingly*) Yes, no doubt that is so in some cases. Only yesterday Mr. Brook told me of a case where a girl was so tired by all the—the preparations that she implored her mother to let her younger sister go through just the ceremony in her place. She had positively lost all personal interest in the affair. And after the wedding she spent the first three days of the honeymoon asleep. Oh yes, that is quite possible, for I was once taken to see one of our village girls at Erth who had already been asleep for a week, and she was single.

2. IN THE DINING-ROOM

MR. WICKHAM (*when the last lady has gone out and the door is shut*)—Now let us all draw up closer. Mr. Dean, you are drinking nothing. Try some white port. Went white of its own accord.

LORD DOVEMERE (*interested*)—I had some too, Wickham, that did that. Showed it to a wine-dealing chap, and he smacked his lips and swore it was grand Madeira. Those fellows know nothing about wine (*helping himself pretty liberally*).

MR. WICKHAM—Absolutely nothing, and as for whisky or brandy—(*shrugging his shoulders*). But the Dean knows a thing or two. Why, not so very long ago the Chapter owned a vineyard in Portugal and kept their cellars in the Cathedral crypt.

THE DEAN (*his eyes twinkling*)—Ah, we live in a degenerate age. I do what I can with the Deanery cellars, and the crypt is devoted to meetings of the Band of Hope.

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LORD DOVEMERE (*seriously*)—I call that sort of thing sacrilege. These cranks might leave us our cathedrals, at any rate. They've ruined politics for decent people, and every profession is full of men you can't sit down to dinner with. Why, even the Army—I tell you I saw the other day that the son of my favourite shirt-man had got his company. What d'ye think of that?

MR. BROOK — I believe it's those City fellows. Look how they get peers for their prospectuses—(*breaking off suddenly as he remembers Lord Dovemere's connection with the Electric Milk Company, in liquidation*).

LORD DOVEMERE (*completely ignoring Mr. Brook*)—Why, the Army has gone to pot. Give me the Navy. I like your honest sailor-man (*drinking*), none of your sham gentility about him. (*Inconsequently*) The country's all right as long as it drinks port. People talk of Joe, and say the country's going to pot, but Joe daren't touch our port. Daren't touch it, I say (*irritably*).

THE DEAN (*blandly*)—You remind me of those amusing lines about “Britannia's stately

port" in "The Compleat Politician." You know them, Lord Dovemere?

LORD DOVEMERE (*who was the unacknowledged author of that succès de scandale*)—Let me see. Oh yes, I recollect the thing now you mention it. Ever hear who wrote it?

THE DEAN (*who knows perfectly well*)—It was attributed to all sorts of people, and I have myself heard three distinct individuals reluctantly acknowledge——

LORD DOVEMERE—What, three? That's good, 'pon my soul! Couldn't all have done it, could they, eh?

THE DEAN (*calmly*)—None of them could.

LORD DOVEMERE (*beginning to think that this must be an altogether exceptional Dean*)—Funny that you should have taken to the parson line. Now, do you know, I can't help thinking if you'd taken to politics you'd have made—er—well, not such a mess of it as some people I could mention.

THE DEAN—Nay, nay, my cloth is my pride. As for politics, in these days it is dirty work in which the best men seldom come to the top. Indeed, are not many of

them leaving it in sheer disgust? The Americanising of our institutions——

MR. BROOK (*in the middle of an anecdote*)—— . . . and the Duchess raised the foaming goblet to her lips and the elderberry wine went down her throat simply like cream, and when she had drained it to the dregs she embraced me affectionately and said, “You dear little fellow, that’s the very finest ’57 port I ever tasted!”

MR. WICKHAM (*laughing*)—Oh, Tommy, I didn’t think you’d kiss and tell!

MR. STANDISH (*suspiciously*)—You haven’t said which Duchess.

MR. BROOK—My dear fellow, she hasn’t the honour of knowing you.

SIR JOHN MOON—Well, Wickham, it won’t be long before you’re popping away at the grouse, eh?

LORD DOVEMERE—’Pon my word I don’t envy you, Wickham. I always cut and run from Scotland when every one’s going up there.

THE DEAN—Ah, so you don’t shoot, Lord Dovemere?

LORD DOVEMERE—My kind friends say I can't, and all because I bagged two hares once.

THE DEAN—Well, but what was wrong with that?

LORD DOVEMERE (*chuckling*)—People always ask that. You see, they'd been bagged before and a boy was carrying them over his back. I was a bit jumpy that day, and couldn't see anything but the fur. (*Gloomily*) But the brat's father made me stump up, I can tell you.

MR. DUNSTABLE—Talking of sport, I have great news. Jim has been asked to play for the county against Surrey next week (*proudly*).

MR. WALBERTON—Oh, spare my blushes. I come cheaper than a pro, you know, I won't take exes of any sort.

MR. BROOK—I once played crickball against a team of girls. We had stumps, girls had bats. One girl thought my legs were the wicket. I shall carry the marks to my grave (*solemnly*).

MR. DUNSTABLE (*affectionately*)—Well,

my dear Jim, you know it has been my great ambition that you should play for the old county I played for years ago.

MR. WALBERTON (*touched*)—Yes, sir, I know, and it is really for your sake and (*in a low tone*) Susie's that I'm so pleased. You must bring her up to the Oval for the match.

SIR JOHN MOON (*jovially*)—Let's all go up to town and see Jim bowl out those Surrey chaps. Dashed if I don't make up a party, and we could dine at Jimmy's, most appropriate that, ha! ha! and go on to the Pav. or something, eh? Nothing like London when London's empty, I think.

MR. WALBERTON—My dear Moon, I should be a crock the next day after painting the town red under your auspices.

SIR JOHN—Tut, tut, you young fellows play your games so devilish scientifically nowadays. Why, when I was at Brasenose we trained on the college ale, sir, brewed by the college, and we weren't put to bed at ten with feeding-bottles like the present generation of youngsters, I can tell you. And we had our whack of port, and we kept a nag or

two apiece, and we stayed head of the river, my boy. Gad, it makes me young again to think of it!

MR. WALBERTON (*mischievously*)—Oh yes, you were president of the Hell Fire Club, weren't you?—or rather I should say vice-president (*meaningly*).

SIR JOHN (*disturbea*)—No, no, Jim, I give you my word, that was before my time. I did very well with the Phoenix.

MR. WALBERTON—Until you were transplanted to the Tavern, eh?

LORD DOVEMERE—Margate's the place to go to in August. Not for long, you know, one day's enough for most people.

MR. DUNSTABLE—Really, you recommend it? I have always been told that the air is most beneficial, but I confess I should not have thought that you——

LORD DOVEMERE (*contemptuously*)—Air! Pooh! Go to Margate on a cheap trip day, not by the cheap trip train of course, and see your—*our* masters enjoying themselves. It's a political education. Ugly brutes! Yes, I think I will have another liqueur, Wickham.

I assure you I often feel tempted to go up to people in the street and say, "Go away and kill yourself, you are too hideous to live, to say nothing of voting." The brutes wouldn't be so offensive if they weren't so infernally pleased with themselves, you know.

THE DEAN—Beauty as a test of citizenship? No, I fear you wouldn't get a majority for that, Lord Dovemere, unless indeed you mixed it up cleverly with woman suffrage.

LORD DOVEMERE (*his face becoming crimson*)—W—Woman suffrage——

MR. WICKHAM (*determined to stop this*)—Will any one have any more? No? Well, then, I think we may go to the drawing-room.

XIV
CONFIDENCES

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CONFIDENCES

THE west terrace at Wickhamswood, long and flagged, with green garden-seats at intervals, rises a few feet above the level of the tennis-courts, to which three short flights of stone steps give access. Here are collected MISS SUSAN DUNSTABLE, looking very young and pretty in a white muslin gown with blue sash and a white straw hat trimmed with a wreath of corn-flowers; MISS OLIVE BUTLER-GREEN in a blue serge skirt, neat pale mauve shirt, black tie, and sailor hat; and MISS JENNY BUTLER-GREEN, in an old grey coat and skirt. They are all waiting for some one to come out and make a fourth.

SUSAN (*earnestly*)—And do you really think, Olive, that no one ever marries their first love? I'm sure mother did.

OLIVE (*quickly*)—Don't you believe it. Is it likely that any girl would fall in love, for the first time I mean, with a clergyman? (*Sharply*) No, you needn't make signs to me,

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Jenny. Susan's much too sensible to be offended at what I say. Why, she simply laughed at that poor Mr. Bunnable.

SUSAN (*blushing*)—But he wasn't like father. I'm sure father was a very nice young man, I mean when he married mother. (*Turning to Mabel Butler-Green, who is just coming up to the little group on the terrace*) Isn't it nonsense to say that no girl ever falls in love with a clergyman?

MABEL (*suspiciously*)—Who said they could—or couldn't? Who are you talking about? Oh, Mr. Bunnable, I suppose. But I thought he had gone away for good.

SUSAN—Oh, I'm so tired of hearing that dreadful man's name. Don't let's ever mention him again. *I* didn't tell people about it.

JENNY—My dear little Susan, we all agree with you. It's much pleasanter to marry one's first love—if one can find him again—but personally I would rather marry my last and final fancy, I should feel so much safer.

SUSAN (*pouting*)—Now I know you're

laughing at me. Nice people only have one real love.

JENNY — Then you wouldn't marry a widower?

SUSAN (*indignantly*) — Of course not! How can you ask me such a question?

MABEL (*severely*) — You are all talking the most fearful nonsense.

SUSAN (*lowering her voice*) — But do tell me, is it really true that Lady Dovemere likes some one else better than she does her own husband? My godmother told mother so.

JENNY (*sharply*) — I should in her place. Why, he's a perfect wretch. He's even horrid to her before other people. Of course it's her own fault. She knew what he was like before she was engaged to him. I remember, oh, ages ago, when I was quite a little girl, hearing how mean he was. It was in Egypt, and the girls he rode with had to give the donkey-boys bakhsheesh themselves every time. He always pretended not to see. I think the richest people are often the meanest. Still, she does get lovely

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things. All her clothes, even her veils, come from Paris. She hasn't been disappointed in that matter. You know her people are comparatively poor, and as she cares for nothing but dress——

SUSAN (*surprised*)—Why, my godmother said she cared for nothing but Captain Anstruther!

JENNY (*gravely*)—True, I was forgetting. Yes, half her affection is fixed on Captain Anstruther, and at least two-thirds on dress. A good many women are like that (*sententiously*).

OLIVE (*severely*)—Pray, Jenny, don't talk so flippantly. Really, Susan, you know it's always wrong to mention names—I mean of course when the people are married. It is quite possible to talk a lot of scandal without ever mentioning a single name.

SUSAN (*protesting*)—But I wasn't talking scandal! I was only telling you what my godmother told mother. Besides, I heard your own mother (*triumphantly*) say that everybody in town knew of *his* infatuation for *her*. And I don't wonder she likes a

real hero like Captain—— like the Bishop's nephew, with his V.C., much better than that horrid *you know who*. That isn't scandal!

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OLIVE (*sighing*)—At my time of life it's pleasanter to watch a single than to play in a double.

JENNY—You poor old thing! Has anything gone more wrong than usual?

OLIVE (*listlessly*)—No, not more wrong than usual. Still, there's a good deal to be said for the Chinese method of disposing of girl babies.

JENNY (*with some hesitation*)—Look here! He really isn't worth the time and trouble you waste on him. Every one knows about the Lady Albinia episode, and——

OLIVE (*crossly*)—It's so easy to be hard on other people's lovers. Of course any impartial person would have realised that Lady Alby was—well, quite an exception. For instance, if a duke were to ask us to marry him of course we should say yes!

JENNY (*flushing*)—Speak for yourself and for Mabel. I wouldn't.

OLIVE (*changing her tone*)—No, Jenny, and I wouldn't either—now. But I should be a little tempted, and even you would be a tiny wee bit tempted. Think how mad Aunt Jane would be! Well, V. S. was tempted. (*Wistfully*) Don't you understand?

JENNY—If you really mean, honest Injun, that you like V. S. so much that you simply couldn't think of any one else, then you really must become Mrs. V. S., and I'll help you all I can, though you know I never liked——

OLIVE (*putting her hand over Jenny's firm little mouth*)—Please don't say it, dear. Be nice to me.

JENNY (*muffled*)—Well, I will be. You see, men marry when they choose, women when others choose. Has he ever—ever? You know what I mean.

OLIVE (*meditating*)—Of course—often. Why, he told me how shamefully Lady Alby had behaved to him. A man wouldn't tell a thing like that to everybody. He always tells me everything. You would be astonished if you knew how many girls have really—well, all but proposed to him!

JENNY (*sagely*)—Yes, but has *he* ever proposed to *you*?

OLIVE (*hesitating*)—People make love in so many different ways nowadays. It must have been a much simpler matter when mother and Aunt Jane were girls. Then one had only to wait till one was asked.

JENNY (*savagely*)—Yes, even if one was spiteful and silly and stupid.

OLIVE (*sympathetically*)—You poor old thing. You do hate her, don't you, but you'll have to like her better some day if——

JENNY (*quickly*)—Don't let us talk about off-chances, but about certainties. I know he likes you, and I can't make out why he doesn't come to the point. Why not make the Duchess give him a hint?

OLIVE (*despondently*)—She has, but it's no use. Besides, we often talk it over.

JENNY—Well, what does she advise?

OLIVE—She? Who do you mean? I meant that V. S. and I often talk it over. Why shouldn't we? We're the people whom it concerns. There's so much false delicacy about these things.

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JENNY (*puzzled*)—Surely V. S. doesn't weigh you in the balance and find you wanting—to your face?

OLIVE (*exasperated*)—My dear Jenny, you put things in such a crude, horrid way. I don't think I'll tell you anything more about it. You're so unsympathetic——

JENNY (*humbly*)—Please tell me. I didn't mean to be horrid.

OLIVE (*relenting*)—Well, he quite agrees that it would pay him, for he's being awfully swindled by his servants since his old nurse died.

JENNY — “Cherchez la femme,” as the Marquise would say.

OLIVE (*unsuspiciously*)—Yes, I couldn't help being relieved to hear of the good old soul's death. She really was an obstacle. He trusted her completely. Now he never has a happy moment with thinking what may be going on at Pulteney Cross.

JENNY (*interested*)—I've often wondered what sort of a place it is, and why he keeps it up if he's never there.

OLIVE — Oh, he goes there whenever

there's no other place for him to go. You forget, my dear Jenny, even the most worldly people have a certain sentimental feeling about their own home. Why, after a few days at Erth I feel quite glad to get back to the flat.

JENNY (*rudely*)—Oh, skip the flat! Any place is heaven after Aunt Jane!

OLIVE (*slowly*)—Then of course he knows that my people are—are all right. I think those sort of things make more difference to men than they do to women. He often talks to me about father's people.

JENNY (*laughing*)—And then I suppose you trot out the Viscount and his palace on the bog.

OLIVE — Don't be so vulgar. People think a lot of those things, (*sighing*) but they think quite as much of money. He has often told me, of course in a very delicate, roundabout manner, that he simply can't afford to marry an absolutely penniless girl. Now I think that's quite reasonable. It isn't as if he was the owner of a place like Erth (*significantly*). That sort of man

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needn't hesitate, he simply has to choose for himself.

JENNY (*hastily*)—Yet V. S. must be fairly well off. He has never done anything——

OLIVE—The only profession he would have cared to enter was the Army.

JENNY—Well, I know he was ploughed, but there's always the backstairs.

OLIVE (*with dignity*)—He's not the sort of man for the militia, besides his heart is weak. Even the Duchess admits that he makes a capital visitor.

JENNY—Ah, that's a very well-filled profession!

OLIVE—Still he says, truly enough, that there comes a time when a man gets tired of rushing about from place to place making himself pleasant from morning till night. I do think (*hesitating*) that—if I am patient——

JENNY—You will ultimately be asked to take the place of the old nurse-housekeeper. When a man says he adores you, it's only a pretty way of saying, "You can come and live with me and order my dinner." No,

don't interrupt me, I'm going to be always nice to you—and to him—after to-day. (*Catching hold of Olive's arm*) I am a wretch! Don't, darling! I meant to have one more try and talk you out of V. S., but it's no use. I have a sort of feeling that a piece of luck is coming your way. In fact, the Marquise told me yesterday as a great secret that she knew you would soon be Mrs. V. S.—that is, if you still wished it.

OLIVE (*drying her eyes*)—Oh, what rot! How can she know anything about it? She thinks she's still in France. There every girl has money as a matter of course.

JENNY (*laughing*)—Then I hope our dear V. S. will never go there—I mean, of course, till he's safely tied in a knot!

OLIVE (*uneasily*)—I hope she hasn't gone and asked him to stop with her. She told mother that she was very fond of matchmaking. Of course French girls are very young and silly—not at all his style—and yet——

JENNY (*incautiously*)—There's something so prize-packety about men. Still, it's everything to draw just the article one wants, and

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I do honestly think that this time you will succeed in pulling out a plum.

OLIVE (*offended*)—My dear Jenny, you do say such odd things sometimes that I can't make you out.

XV

BENEFIT OF CLERGY

BENEFIT OF CLERGY

THE Cathedral lies like a great grey sea-bird brooding in the sleepy August afternoon over the red-roofed little city at its feet. The delicate restlessness of Gothic tracery and pinnacles, relieved here and there by a bit of sturdy simple Norman, is cut clear against the cloudless sky. The rooks sweep majestically round the elms in the close, and in the Deanery garden the bees "make boot upon the summer's velvet buds." Through the garden, heavy with the fragrance of old-fashioned flowers, come The MARQUISE and MISS MABEL BUTLER-GREEN, guided by the DEAN of BUNTINGHAM. The Dean's key admits them through an old iron-bound door in the massive grey wall which surrounds the Deanery. Crossing a grassy hollow, long since dry, where the monks kept their fat carp, they soon reach the grateful cool of the cloisters.

THE DEAN—You were kind enough to say that you would like to see my little people, Madame. I think we shall find them in the inner cloister, the only place where their

nurse has permission to let them play alone.

THE MARQUISE—A cathedral cloister must indeed be a liberal education.

THE DEAN—Ah, Madame, when I show my cathedral to one of your Church I always feel a kind of ex post facto robber. But indeed I am only an accessory after the fact!

THE MARQUISE (*graciously*)—In this case at least the sins of the fathers have not been visited upon the children. Ah (*her voice softening*) there are your little angels! (*Jack, six years old, clad in somewhat grimy brown holland overalls, blue eyes and fair curls; and Margy, seven years old, straight black hair and large brown eyes, dressed in a blue cotton frock, white pinafore, and tumbled sun-bonnet, run up eagerly and submit to being kissed with no trace of shyness.*) Perhaps I may repose myself with them awhile?

THE DEAN (*earnestly*)—By all means, if you are sure they will not tire you, and then perhaps (*turning to Mabel*) you might like to see that curious old fresco we have found

near the organ-loft. The stairs are rather steep, but I know you are interested——

[*They go off.*]

THE MARQUISE (*sitting down on the low stone base from which springs the delicate arcading of the cloister*)—And so this sacred spot is your playground?

BOTH CHILDREN (*shocked*)—Oh no, it isn't!

THE MARQUISE (*putting an arm round each little figure*)—And yet I observe you both have a garden.

MARGY (*importantly*)—Them's our cemeteries. We're always looking about for dead things to bury. Yesterday we had a dear little bird. To-day (*regretfully*) we've only found a worm, but he was quite dead.

JACK (*suddenly*)—Are you a friend of father's?

THE MARQUISE—I trust so.

JACK—Then there's no harm in telling you. We buried Nick, father's dog, you know, there (*indicating the square grass-grown space in the middle of the cloister*). But you mustn't tell the Bishop (*appre-*

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hensively). Blood, he's father's own verger, you know, he did it. Father was so sorry when Nick died—about as sorry as if we had. So Blood dug the grave here, out of respect I s'pose. Father said he wouldn't have chosen it, but as the hole was made he said we might have the funeral if the Bishop didn't know. It might have put him out to think he would be buried so near Nick, you see, and yet Nick could do tricks that the Bishop's dog couldn't (*scornfully*).

THE MARQUISE—And do you often go to see the kind Bishop and lady Bishop?

JACK (*considering*)—We see him in the Cathedral, but Lord love you——

MARGY (*reprovingly*)—You mustn't say that, Jack, you know you mustn't!

JACK (*angrily*)—Let me alone, Lord love you—what was I saying? Oh yes! Lord love you, he is only a visitor, that's what Blood says. We, father and us, are master in the Cathedral.

MARGY (*gravely*)—Nice people are always kind to visitors.

JACK—So we are. Even Blood's afraid

of him, though he was a soldier once. (*Ab-ruptly*) Have you got any children?

THE MARQUISE—Indeed I have. The two prettiest little boys in the world.

MARGY—I wish you had brought them, with you, then. They could have been the mourners at the worm's funeral. We were just beginning when you came (*regretfully*). Do your little boys like boys or girls best to play with?

THE MARQUISE (*hesitating*)—One of them, André is his name, is certainly very fond of girls.

MARGY (*eagerly*)—Will he even play at dolls with them?

THE MARQUISE (*smiling*)—It is the other, my Paul, who has a doll—the dearest, funniest little doll in the world. It cries and laughs——

MARGY—Then it must be a French doll.

THE MARQUISE—It is, it is!

JACK (*contemptuously*)—I had a doll once, I had two dolls once, I had three dolls once, but (*triumphantly*) I buried them all!

MARGY (*quickly*)—But not here; father

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wouldn't let us. We're only allowed to bury little tiny things here (*reverently*).

JACK—It's such a long long time since father was a little boy that he has forgotten all about it. Rather a bore for me only having Margy to play with. We're not allowed to go to children's parties for fear we should catch measles and things.

THE MARQUISE—And do you often go to the Cathedral?

JACK—'Course we do. Father says he always preaches ever so much better if I'm there to encourage him. (*Candidly*) I don't listen much, I watch Blood. He pretends not to see me and I pretend not to see him, but I'm watching all the time. You should see him carrying the silver poker in front of father.

MARGY—Oh yes, and Jack once made me carry our dining-room poker in front of him to see what it would feel like. Wasn't he silly?

JACK—Ah, you didn't do it like Blood, and so I didn't feel anything. I asked Blood once to do it for me properly with the real

poker, but he said it was against the Queen's Regulations and the Articles of War, and I must wait till I'm grown up and am a Dean myself. Oh, didn't you hate to be told to wait for things till you were grown up? And perhaps I shan't care about my poker when I'm a Dean, I'm sure father doesn't.

MARGY (*suddenly*)—Why, where can father be? It's hours and hours since he went away.

JACK (*contemptuously*)—Oh, how you 'zaggerate, Margy. It's just a minute or two. Father's legs aren't as young as they used to be, and he's got to show that girl the picture thing.

THE MARQUISE (*interested*)—And do you also know Miss Mabel well?

JACK—We shall know her very well soon, for father's going to ask her to stay with us. He told us so last night in bed.

MARGY (*anxious to be strictly accurate*)—But perhaps she won't come. You know, Jack, he said perhaps she wouldn't come.

THE MARQUISE (*curiously*)—And will you be pleased if she says yes?

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JACK (*gazing thoughtfully before him*)—
Oh, I don't know.

MARGY—Father said he was very lonely sometimes, I suppose it's after we've gone to bed, and then she could talk to him. (*Both children rush off to meet their father and his companion, who are slowly coming round the cloister with an air of subdued happiness in their demeanour which does not escape the observant eye of the Marquise.*)

THE DEAN (*seeing that the children want to carry off Mabel with a view to some mystic funeral rites*)—Now, darlings, you have talked quite long enough, I'm sure. Run back to your gardens while I show this kind lady and Ma— Miss Butler-Green over the Cathedral.

JACK—Yes, but father—

THE DEAN—Not now, my boy. If you feel tired of being out here you may go in and ring the hall bell for nurse.

JACK (*consulting his sister with a look*)—
We'll stop out here and finish the worm's fune—

MABEL (*beaming on the children*)—Dear

little things! What pretty game have they invented in keeping with their beautiful playground?

THE DEAN (*hurriedly*)—Yes, exactly so, an ideal spot, so near the Deanery. And now, Madame, shall we see the Cathedral? I assure you we think it fully equal to Chartres.

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THE DEAN (*opening a mediæval iron gate and admitting the ladies into a curious oblong chapel*)—I have left this to the last because it is to me the most interesting of all the chapels. It is the old Parvise Chapel, generally called the Deans' Burying-place. Most of my predecessors are buried here, indeed all except two, who became Archbishops, one of Canterbury and the other of York. I put in those little memorial tablets with the arms. Do you see the pallium of Canterbury and the crossed keys of York?

THE MARQUISE (*with evident sincerity*)—May you live many, many years of happiness and honour before you too are laid with your predecessors in this holy spot!

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THE DEAN (*thoughtfully*)—Ah, Madame, a man might be well content that his bones should lie with such other dust—and yet I do not feel myself to be of their company, for they all, save only the two that grasped at mitres, were endowed with humility, and that is not my quality, for good or for evil.

XVI

“MARRIAGES HAVE BEEN
ARRANGED . . .”

“MARRIAGES HAVE BEEN ARRANGED . . .”

IN the State Bedroom at Wickhamswood, The MARQUISE is at the escritoire finishing a letter before dressing for dinner.

THE MARQUISE (*rising with a smile of welcome as Mrs. Butler-Green comes in and embraces her warmly*)—Well?

MRS. BUTLER-GREEN—Ah, I see you suspect something! Do you remember telling me that you had the happy hand, that you brought your friends luck? Well, you’ve been a regular mascotte to me. I suppose they’ve told you.

THE MARQUISE (*embracing her affectionately*)—I have heard nothing, but I see by your face, dear, that something—a piece of good fortune has arrived to the children. Perhaps George——

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MRS. BUTLER-GREEN—Oh no, it's nothing to do with George at all, but (*her eyes filling with tears*) it is about the girls. My darling Olive and Mabel are both engaged, and really in each case to the very man I would have chosen. You know in my happy days, Corisande, I was always a religious woman, but—well, I suppose a little of the happiness I have been so long without made me better, for I went down on my knees and thanked God. Oh, I have been so wretched, everything seemed to go wrong with my girls. People think mothers are pushing and scheming. If they are, what is there to be ashamed of? I used to think of my poor Pat, he was so fond and proud of his three little girls, and never used to lament, as my people did, that they weren't boys. The thought that when he would see them again in heaven they would be three old maids was really terrible. Those sort of dreadful ideas always came to me in church, and so, as you may imagine, I didn't go to church often. Till I saw you again there was no one who understood—no one. The whole thing was

a sort of joke to my friends. Oh dear, I feel quite hysterical. But I haven't yet told you who they are (*wiping her eyes*).

THE MARQUISE (*stroking her hand*)—No, but I can guess. The excellent and charming Dean, n'est-ce pas? And so Mabel will be maman tout de suite, happy girl.

MRS. BUTLER-GREEN (*importantly*)—Yes, the Dean of Buntingham! It is almost incredible. Of course I always knew that he liked Mabel, but that it would really come to anything seemed—seemed (*in a low tone*) too good to be true. He has written such a nice letter, so—so gentlemanly and full of good feeling. Just fancy, it was settled yesterday while they were in the Cathedral, but he asked her to say nothing about it till he had written to me. As for my other son-in-law to be, (*nervously*) I fear you won't be quite so pleased, but Olive does like him so much. It is Mr. Vere Standish.

THE MARQUISE (*radiant*)—But I am exceedingly pleased! I consider Mr. Vere Standish a very seriously estimable young man. He is always most courteous to me,

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and it is easy to see (*with a little smile*) that his wife will always be able to persuade him for his good. And when the weddings?

MRS. BUTLER - GREEN (*cheerfully*)—Oh, well, there's no immediate hurry, is there?

THE MARQUISE (*earnestly*)—Oh, dear friend, in that truly we French people know best, and even you have a proverb—I know, for your brother has sometimes quoted it to me—"Marry at leisure and repent in haste." There you see the wisdom of all the ages crystallised.

MRS. BUTLER-GREEN (*meaningly*)—Ah, so that is George's rendering, is it? Well, I mustn't keep you from dressing.

MRS. FURLEIGH (*coming in as Mrs. Butler-Green goes out*)—Oh, I see that Olivia has already told you the great piece, or rather I should say the great pieces, of news. She doesn't seem exactly overjoyed, does she? I should be, in her place. Of course she owes Vere Standish to my daughter. Propinquity, you know! (*Sinking into an arm-chair*) I have never disliked that young man as much as every one else seems to do and after all

Flora says it's a very good match for Olive. In fact she is quite amazed at the affair having come to a satisfactory conclusion.

THE MARQUISE—And also what a handsome marriage the excellent Mabel is making! I suppose a Dean is a sort of Protestant Cardinal.

MRS. FURLEIGH (*shocked*)—Oh no, there's nothing princely about the position, not even the apron, which is so convenient in recognising bishops, especially the colonial ones. And as for robes—you know I always think the red robes add so much dignity to the Cardinals of your Church, Corisande. I suppose also that they are always of noble birth, I mean of course the foreign ones. Now the Dean, Olivia's prospective son-in-law, was the son of a tallow-chandler. He is entirely what we call a self-made man.

THE MARQUISE (*with enthusiasm*)—Such success, and by his own merits! How sublime! And these won him an English duke's daughter. Mabel is indeed fortunate!

MRS FURLEIGH (*meditatively*)—Ah, yes, poor Lady Louisa *would* have him. All her

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people were furious, every one said it wouldn't turn out well, and you see she did die just as he began to get preferment.

THE MARQUISE—Well, it is not for us to regret the departure of the highly estimable Lady Louisa. We can but pray for her soul (*a gesture of horrified protest from Mrs. Furleigh*), and hope that dear Mabel will survive to become a Mrs. Bishop, and even, if it is desirable, a Mrs. Archbishop!

MRS. WICKHAM (*coming in with but little ceremony*)—Well, isn't Aunt Olivia in luck? Don't look so sad about it, mother. Other people's weddings are always good fun. Charlie says that he's awfully pleased at the double event having come off at Wickhams-would. By the way, here's a telegram just come for you, Madame (*handing a telegram to the Marquise*).

THE MARQUISE—You allow me? (*opening and reading to herself:—"Brava! Hommages sincères!—G."*).

MRS. WICKHAM (*brusquely*)—Well, what is it? I know it's from Uncle George, the post-mistress told me so, but she said she

couldn't make it out as it was in some heathen language. (*Thoughtfully*) Then I knew it must be French.

THE MARQUISE (*for once quite out of countenance*)—Nothing. A little investment of mine. Sir George is so kind.

MRS. FURLEIGH (*rather relieved*)—Oh yes, George is a very good man of business. In fact I'm often surprised that he is so generous. Now I'm sure he'll give those two girls very handsome presents—indeed Olivia probably counts on him for the trousseaux.

XVII

NOT A PARALLEL CASE

NOT A PARALLEL CASE

THE MARQUISE has invited LADY DOVEMERE to take an after-breakfast stroll in a shady part of the gardens. The sun, now mounting high in the heavens, lights up the figures of Susan Dunstable and Jim Walberton as they saunter away down the path to the park.

LADY DOVEMERE (*looking wistfully after the pair*)—I wonder—I hope they will be happy. But it's awfully difficult to tell. (*Turning to the Marquise*) Girls are such fools—English girls, I mean. I know they manage things differently in France. I can remember a time when I actually thought myself in love with my husband. (*Bitterly*) It sounds almost incredible, doesn't it?

THE MARQUISE (*pityingly*)—My poor child, you should not talk so. À quoi bon ?

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LADY DOVEMERE (*looking at her fixedly*)—I suppose you would think it horribly wicked for a woman to—(*desperately*) to begin her life over again—I mean with some one else?

THE MARQUISE (*in a low voice*)—More unwise perhaps than wicked.

LADY DOVEMERE (*digging the point of her parasol into the turf*)—Even if she knew that no one, least of all her husband, would really regret any folly she chose to commit, and also that she would make the only creature who ever really cared for her perfectly happy? Of course I know it sounds very improper and all that. But isn't it far more wrong to allow a girl, and even to encourage her, to marry a cruel, dissipated, selfish man, simply because he is—but where's the good of talking about it? Of course I know what everybody thinks. I may be rather stupid, but I can't help seeing that my affairs are discussed. Even Mrs. Wickham has dared to give me good advice. As if any talking had ever stopped any one doing anything! I should have done what they all, even my husband, now fear I shall do if

it hadn't been (*a sob*) that I knew very well it would ruin his career in—in the service.

THE MARQUISE (*slowly*)—Yes, that would not be a fair thing to do. I feel I would like to make you a confidence about—about a friend of mine. You remind me of her, for she, too, struggled and suffered as you are now suffering. You know how we arrange marriages in France. Generally all goes well, but there are the exceptions, and her case was a terrible exception. The marriage, which took place when—when my friend was seventeen, was suitable as regarded birth and fortune, but the man (*hesitating*) was what French gentlemen rarely are—a brute. He had all the vices, but none of the high breeding which distinguished the men of the old régime. His young wife, almost from the day of the marriage, was profoundly wretched, she had no parents to protect her, or to whom she could fly for refuge. In one matter her position differed, I think for the better, from yours, Lady Dovemere. She became the mother of children, but, alas! that it should be so, even the most beloved of

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these endearing little creatures do not absorb the whole mind of a young woman eager, as is of her age, for joy and pleasure.

LADY DOVEMERE (*languidly*)—And so I suppose she got to like some one else. (*Naïvely*) Frenchwomen generally do, don't they?

THE MARQUISE (*reddening*)—Of course that is not a thing one confides, as a rule, even to one's dearest friend. But I believe—I mean I used sometimes to imagine, for all this is ancient history now, that circumstances did lead my poor friend into the familiar company of one whom under happier conditions she might have loved most tenderly. Who can tell how far she may have been tempted? But I can certify this to you, she suffered very deeply—indeed, her fortitude was almost at an end—and sometimes since I have trembled to think of what she might have done, when an unforeseen circumstance changed her whole life.

LADY DOVEMERE (*indifferently*)—Oh, you mean, I suppose, that her husband reformed. I know that sort of thing happens in novels,

but never in real life — at least not in English life. You know here it's for better for worse.

THE MARQUISE (*slowly*)—Ah, no, the husband did not alter—he died.

XVIII

THE PARTING GUEST

THE PARTING GUEST

THE hall is refreshingly cool in the sultry August afternoon, and The MARQUISE, MRS. FURLEIGH, MRS. WICKHAM, JENNY BUTLER-GREEN, LORD DOVEMERE, MR. WICKHAM, and MR. BROOK, are gathered round the tea-table.

THE MARQUISE (*holding a letter in her hand*)—Yes, I feel rather troubled. It is the second time my son André has sprained his foot. Poor boy (*brightening*), he will not be able to go out or to pay any visits for at least a month.

MRS. WICKHAM (*politely*)—I hope this news will not oblige you to shorten your visit to England.

THE MARQUISE (*hesitating*)—I think not—I have perfect confidence in my daughter-in-law. She is devoted to her brother and he will have every care.

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MRS. FURLEIGH—Things often turn out for the best, in the most unexpected manner.

THE MARQUISE (*gratefully*)—Yes indeed, dear friend; when I first received this letter I felt very—what do you say?—upset. Then I bethought myself that no doubt his guardian angel had a good purpose in view when he caused him to trip in this alarming manner.

MRS. FURLEIGH—Oh, I did not mean that at all. That would be most Jesuitical and——

MRS. WICKHAM (*turning to Tommy Brook*)—I drove round by the station, Tommy. It's all right. They'll stop the express. But you will have to get up at four thirty or so. I hope you don't expect any one to give you a send-off.

MR. BROOK (*cheerfully*)—Certainly not. I never expect five o'clock in the morning love from my friends. I've had a jolly good time, seeing most of the games, don't you know. Why, sometimes I felt as if I should be the next. I thought of Jenny, as she is the only one unappropriated, but I'm too fond of her, it wouldn't be fair (*sighing*).

JENNY (*smiling*)—I don't fancy your sit.'s open to a married man, Tommy, you would have had to leave me behind. You will be bringing back a lovely American bride, but you mustn't play any of your little tricks till you're safely married. Girls don't appreciate practical jokes.

MR. WICKHAM—Dovemere, you're not having any tea. (*With an obvious effort*) Perhaps you'd like a whisky and soda?

LORD DOVEMERE—Well, I do feel a bit off colour, you know, and my doctor says tea's indigestible stuff. I don't know what was the matter with that drink I had this morning. It tasted awfully queer (*looking suspiciously at Tommy Brook*).

MR. BROOK (*hastily*)—Well, Flora, you must admit that I've minded the paint according to contract—but really, all this marrying and giving in marriage has made it dreadfully hard. Think what opportunities I've sacrificed for your sake. I could have shown such sport with all these pairs of lovers. (*Dolefully*) It seems such a waste, Flora.

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LORD DOVEMERE (*gloomily*)—Of all the fools that cumber God's earth the most pernicious is the practical joker. Thank Heaven, the game is going out of fashion. Some years ago it was perfectly awful. Every grinning idiot was eternally setting some trap or other for sensible people. No one ever played a practical joke on me (*savagely*) except once, and then I—well, I can't quite tell you about it here (*looking uncertainly at his hostess*).

MR. WICKHAM (*quickly*)—Now I like a good practical joke myself. I say, let's go and look after that drink. I expect it's in the smoking-room. As for you, Tommy, you can spend your last few hours in consoling the ladies.

[*Exeunt Lord Dovemere and Mr. Wickham.*]

MR. BROOK (*wrathfully*)—I'm beginning to see many good points about America. Out West a fellow like that wouldn't be allowed to "cumber God's earth" long, eh?

MRS. WICKHAM (*laughing*)—Oh, Tommy, don't be so bloodthirsty. He is a beast, I know, but——

MRS. FURLEIGH (*placidly*)—I'm sure he didn't mean what he said to apply to any one in particular. No doubt he has troubles of which the world knows nothing. Perhaps it would do him good to unburden his mind. (*Dubiously*) If I find an opportunity——

MRS. WICKHAM (*apprehensively*)—Oh, mother, what an awful idea! I assure you he can be most terribly rude——

JENNY BUTLER-GREEN (*whispering to Mr. Brook*)—Aunt Jane always rushes in where the devil himself might fear to tread.

MR. BROOK (*bompously*)—My dear Jane, your language is shockingly reminiscent of our sweet Gerald's unladylike way of expressing himself—fie! fie!

XIX

EXCLUSIVE TO THE "TRAFALGAR
FLAG"

EXCLUSIVE TO THE "TRAFALGAR FLAG"

OFFICE of the "Trafalgar Flag" (every evening, 1d.), Cockpit Street, Northumberland Avenue. At the foot of the stairs, in a decisively strategic position, sits SAMUEL SAMPSON, commissionaire, in his sentry-box. A large and conspicuous notice intimates:—"The Editor can only see visitors after 12. The Editor is busy. The visitors are many. The latter are requested not to waste the time of the former." It is after eleven. Below in the cellars there is a murmur of preparation while the first plates are already being placed on the machines. Suddenly the doorway is darkened by MR. THOMAS SPOONER, a middle-aged man of shabby-genteel appearance. His abundant limp gray locks are surmounted by a hat of the shape of so many years back that it has almost come round again. His complexion is an unhealthy yellow, and he has a shifty eye.

MR. SPOONER (*heartily*)—Well, Sampson! Paper out yet? Any news? Is the Editor on view?

SAMPSON (*genially*)—Look at the notice, sir. We don't see nobody before 12, hay

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hem. I'll give you a paper in a minute, but if you take my advice wait for the next, which is the fourth edition as you know, sir. We've got a big thing on to-day. The aristocracy shown up once again. Murder and sudden death. Excuse me, Mr. Spooner, but do you live in Dovemere Town down there over the water?

MR. SPOONER (*feeling rather bored*)—No, why?

SAMPSON (*disappointed*)—Because our news would have been more perticularly interesting to you as it would be your ground landlord as provided the "Flag" with its exclusive.

MR. SPOONER (*pricking up his ears*)—Eh, what? What exclusive?

SAMPSON (*mysteriously*)—Ah, that would be telling! You wait for our fourth. No copyright in news. It'll be on every bill this afternoon. Still, we'll have made our scoop first. (*Importantly*) We've a reputation to keep up. We ain't swells for nothing. This is where we romps in. Lords and ladies pervide our copy, ay, and gets jolly well paid for it, they does.

MR. SPOONER (*incautiously*)—Why, I thought it was a butler who——

SAMPSON (*disgusted*)—A butler! Good Lord, ain't you more of a journalist than that comes to. (*With ineffable contempt*) A butler! Don't you believe it. A butler spells something very different, I can tell you. All very well for them 'apenny papers, I daresay. No, Mr. Spooner, sir, I am here to see and not see, to hear and not hear. Would you be surprised to learn that a great many exclusives reaches us via the fair sex? Not lady journalists, bless you, no! You gentlemen 'ave nothing to be afraid of there. Not but what they're sharp sometimes. The other day I 'ear one of them saying, "Oh yes," she says, "I 'ave 'eard that printers use dreadful language." "Well," says he (our Mr. Kerr, you know), "they do occasionally swear awful, specially when they've got Sir William 'Arcourt's manuscript. Sich blasphemy would 'orrify 'Arcourt," he says very serious. "'Ow," she says, "I didn't know you 'ad much of 'is copy about." Mr. Kerr, 'e didn't 'arf like that, but she's a

pleasant young lady enough. (*Suddenly turning round*) Don't you dare to try and slink past without asking my leave, you young rascal! Where may you be hurrying off to so fast, pray?

Boy (*meekly*)—Please, sir, Mr. Kerr wants——

SAMPSON (*majestically waving his hand*)—That'll do, that'll do! Give me that paper. (*Opening the "Trafalgar Flag"*) There, I thought so, but I wanted to make sure. You see, Mr. Spooner, no details till the fourth. Here it is, just enough to make the public blue their coppers on the next edition. "Sudden Death of Lord Dovemere." There, you read it, Mr. Spooner, sir.

MR. SPOONER (*taking the paper and reading out the news in a deep mutter*):—

We regret to announce the terribly sudden death of the Earl of Dovemere, which occurred late last night or early this morning while on a visit to some friends in Kent. The well-informed correspondent who furnishes us with this information adds that the sad event is surrounded by suspicious circumstances, and that it is at present

a mystery how Lord Dovemere came by his untimely end. On inquiry at the Dovemere Estate Office we learn that no intimation had up to that time been received of his lordship's decease. At Lord Dovemere's house in Grosvenor Square our representative was informed that the Earl and Countess left Dundrummy, one of their Scotch seats, last week, in order to pay a series of visits in the South of England.

Roderick Blois, sixth Earl of Dovemere in the peerage of Great Britain, eighth Baron Ramillies in the peerage of Ireland, and a baronet, the descendant of one of the great Marlborough's generals, was born 43 years ago. He succeeded his father in the family honours while he was a boy at Eton, where most of his contemporaries will vividly remember him as a conspicuous ornament of Evans's. He afterwards kept a few terms at Christ Church, but, owing to some difference with the authorities, he did not take his degree. As is well known, Lord Dovemere was one of the great ground landlords of London, and he ranked among the really wealthy members of the Peerage. At one time it was thought that he would have made his mark in politics, and he was given the Under-secretaryship of the Parochial Management Board in the last Government. But he soon wearied of the uncongenial details of this

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office, and he resigned four or five years ago, about the time of his marriage with Angela, youngest daughter of General Sir Thomas Jugurtha Troy, G.C.B. In society Lord Dovemere was, of course, well known, but his sardonic humour, if the truth must be told, made him not a few enemies. No doubt the account of him in "Who's Who," where his favourite recreation is stated to be knitting, was revised by himself. The heir is a distant cousin, Mr. Peter Blois, C.B., of the Treasury, who married Miss Vandembosch, of the Orange Free State, and has issue several sons and daughters.

In our later editions we hope to be able to give authoritative particulars which will effectually clear up the mystery in which Lord Dovemere's death is at present involved.

SAMPSON (*who has been waiting impatiently for Mr. Spooner to finish*)—Yes, as Mr. Kerr was saying only this very morning, what we wants at this time of year, Sampson, is a jolly good old cose saylabes, he says to me. Well, I says, sir, if you asks me, we do want summat to make things hum. We can't try on "Is Wives Needful?" or "Should Cousins Kiss?" It isn't our way.

We go in for legitimate business, Mr. Spooner.

MR. SPOONER (*flapping the paper*)—But Sampson, old man, do tell us, is this yarn true—about Lord Dovemere, I mean? You said something about murder and sudden death, eh?

SAMPSON (*cautiously*)—Oh, that was only my fun, Mr. Spooner. You'll see anything there is to be seen soon enough. (*Patronisingly*) Nothing for you to do, sir. They'll all 'ave it in from us, and only for a snip of the scissors and a dab of paste. Beastly shame, I call it. Now, Mr. Spooner, do you prefer to see the Editor before he's refreshed the inner man, or after. I leave it to you. I'll send up your name this minute if you like.

MR. SPOONER (*thoughtfully*)—Well, what do you advise?

SAMPSON—Well, if you want to catch his right eye, I should say, wait. That's my tip. Call again in a 'our or so, sir. By that time we shall have the hins and houts of this case, though what good it'll do you I can't say.

MR. SPOONER (*confidentially*)—I suppose you—er—can't give me a hint where that story came from, eh, Sampson?

SAMPSON (*who hasn't the slightest idea*)—No, sir! Sorry I can't oblige you. (*Drawing himself up*) The honour of the Press, Mr. Spooner, the honour of the Press!

MR. SPOONER (*trimming his sails accordingly*)—Oh, all right. I don't believe a word of it. The "Flag" is always being stuck.

SAMPSON (*with dignity*)—Maybe we are, maybe we are not. Maybe I do know, maybe I do not know, but (*with a kind of stately hum*) I ain't a-goin' ter tell. [*Exit Mr. Spooner.*] And to think I once knew that young feller as smart a one as you'd find in the gallery of the 'ouse. Ah, well, drink is the undoing of us all! 'Ere, you, Simmonds, when you've quite done a-studyin' of your boots you can cut across and fetch me a pint o' the usual.

XX

DEMI - DEUIL

DEMI-DEUIL

IT is half-past ten. The sunshine streaming in through the open windows lights up various groups gathered together in the hall—The MARQUISE and SIR GEORGE CHENIES ; MISS JENNY BUTLER-GREEN and MR. VERE STANDISH ; MRS. BUTLER-GREEN and SIR JOHN MOON.

SIR GEORGE (*in a low voice to the Marquise*)—Would you glance at this note? It is to a Mr. Hopton, the nearest magistrate. Or perhaps it will be less trouble if I read it to you. (*Reads*) “Wickhams-would, Wednesday. Dear Hopton — I only arrived here last night. My nephew would be very glad if you could come over as soon as possible. A very unfortunate thing has occurred. Lord Dovemere, who has been staying here for the last few days, was found dead at the foot of a staircase early this morning. It was a French lady,

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the Marquise de Rabutin, an old school-friend of my sisters', who found the body. You know Tommy Brook, that foolish young cousin of the Wickhams. Well, I fear—indeed there is no doubt—that poor Dovemere came by his death owing to this lad's insane fondness for practical jokes. He had stretched two or three lengths of string across the three staircases which lead up from the hall to the gallery. The strings were Brook's parting shot, for he took the mail train early this morning, and will have left Southampton on his way to New York unless our telegram was in time to catch him before his boat started. Most probably Dovemere was disturbed by the noise of Brook's wheels, got up, and fell over one of the strings head foremost. Dovemere was in his usual condition when he went upstairs. I know we may count on your friendly help in this sad business. — Believe me to be, yours very truly, GEORGE CHENIES."

THE MARQUISE (*appealingly*)—Is it really necessary to bring my name into the letter, George?

SIR GEORGE (*looking at her steadily*)—I fear it must be so, and you will even have to give evidence at the inquest. It is all-important—you know we agreed as to that with my nephew—that the true state of things should be known at once. I mean, of course, that this unfortunate occurrence was the result of a silly, not a criminal, act. (*Impressively*) I take it, Corisande, you are prepared to swear that the string was stretched across the staircase when you first found the body? If there is any doubt that the wretched man was killed by a fall, there is still time for you to have—to have—made a mistake.

THE MARQUISE (*slowly*)—I swear to you, George, that the cord was stretched across the stair above where I found him.

SIR GEORGE (*obviously much relieved*)—Forgive me for doubting the perfect accuracy of your account. (*Meaningly*) I know your kind heart.

THE MARQUISE (*hurriedly*)—Must I swear—everything?

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SIR GEORGE (*kindly*)—My dear, I fear it will be a disagreeable ordeal, but consider how fortunate it is for that poor silly girl that you, a clear-headed woman of the world, can explain the whole circumstances. Most people would have done something foolish. Had a housemaid found him, her first instinct would have been to untie the string just at the place, and probably also the strings on the other stairs. But you acted, as I have always known you act, prudently and intelligently. Why, all that tomfoolery of strings clears the poor woman from the slightest breath of suspicion.

THE MARQUISE (*in a low voice*)—Then, do you think that any one would suspect Lady Dovemere of—oh, George!

SIR GEORGE (*significantly*)—I may tell you that Robson, that officious footman who was once a policeman, actually came and asked my nephew whether Lady Dovemere should be allowed out of her room. Everything has fallen out so unfortunately, especially the absence of that young idiot. Oh, by the way (*raising his voice*), I suppose my

telegram to Brook at Southampton has gone off—does any one know?

MR. VERE STANDISH—Well, it doesn't much matter if it is delayed, Sir George. The fact is I had a wire to send off myself—purely private business—and so I took the opportunity to telegraph to the "Titania" at the same time. Of course I didn't mention this sad occurrence; it might have made him think twice before coming back here.

SIR GEORGE CHENIES (*shortly*)—I don't think he's that sort of fellow. What did you wire, pray?

MR. VERE STANDISH (*offended*)—How can I remember exactly? Something about it's being to his advantage to give up going to America for the present and to come back here.

(*The door of the breakfast-room opens, and Mrs. Furleigh enters, holding a black-edged handkerchief in her hand.*)

MRS. FURLEIGH—So you all are here! I had to come down the back way because of all those dreadful strings. Oh, George, what an awful thing! And in my poor child's

house, too! I always said something unfortunate would happen when my son-in-law persisted in spite of all my warnings in having that dreadful man—oh, poor fellow, we mustn't say anything against him now. Poor Lady Dovemere! I suppose she can hardly realise it yet——

(Sir George and the Marquise look at one another with dismay.)

SIR GEORGE (*quickly*)—Corisande, you had better go up to her, and if she knows nothing break it to her. *(Taking her hand and leading her unresisting to the staircase.)* Your kind heart will prompt you. See her alone, quite alone. *(In a very low voice)* Make her see, she's rather a fool, that she'd better say as little as possible, you understand. Let her be plunged—no, not in sorrow, that would be too hypocritical—but in stupor. She'd better stay in her room for the present. *(Coming back to Mrs. Furleigh, who has joined Mrs. Butler-Green and Sir John Moon)* Really, we must set an example to the young people and settle down to something. Of course it's a great pity it happened

here. I wish Dovemere had broken his neck out hunting, but seriously there are people whom the world could have spared less easily, eh? Well, I will begin by getting this letter sent off at once.

MRS. FURLEIGH (*following him across the hall*)—You are very heartless, George, and I didn't know you called Corisande by her Christian name. I'm not sure if it's quite proper, I—George! Please don't go away! I want to hear the truth about this affair.

SIR GEORGE (*escaping*)—All right, I'll be back in a moment. Here comes Charlie, who'll tell you all there is to be told.

MR. WICKHAM—Well, I've wired to the relations and to Tommy Brook, and Flora has gone down to the Rectory. I suppose Hopton will be over in an hour. There's nothing to be done till he comes——

MRS. FURLEIGH (*eagerly*)—Now, Charlie, please tell me all about it. I hate mysteries. I can't make out how Tommy Brook can have killed him. (*Meditatively*) *He* wasn't in love with Lady Dovemere. (*Suspiciously*) I didn't see Lord Dovemere again after he'd

gone. (*Indignantly*) Really, girls, what very bad taste to laugh.

JENNY (*apologetically*)—I can't help it, Aunt Jane, I feel quite hysterical. It's so difficult to imagine poor little Tommy Brook committing a murder.

MRS. FURLEIGH (*sharply*)—I don't find it at all difficult to imagine something of the kind. I always thought him a very flippant young man. Really (*as Jenny runs away with her handkerchief to her mouth*), I never saw such ill-timed levity.

MR. WICKHAM (*authoritatively*)—Someone said something just now about Tommy Brook and Lady Dovemere. May I ask you all to be very careful as to what you say? The lightest word may be quoted as evidence.

XXI

AT PRESS RATES

AT PRESS RATES

IN the afternoon of the same day, The MARQUISE, LADY MOON, MRS. FURLEIGH, and MRS. DUNSTABLE are collected in the hall, endeavouring somewhat listlessly to occupy themselves in a manner suitable to a decent grief.

MRS. FURLEIGH (*addressing no one in particular*)—I am sure that if Flora had had the slightest idea that this was going to happen, she would have dissuaded my son-in-law from asking them here.

LADY MOON (*gravely*)—I quite agree with you. I even doubt if Charlie would have been particularly desirous of their company.

MRS. FURLEIGH (*fretfully*)—I can never make out what you mean, Rose. He won't even let me see Lady Dovemere. I do think some one ought to be with her. No doubt she feels very, very sorry now for the

way she went on. In fact I shouldn't be at all surprised if she absolutely (*dropping her voice*) refuses to see Captain Anstruther again. At any rate, now is the moment for some kind older woman to say——

LADY MOON—Poor Angela, I do think she should be spared that horrid hateful word——

MRS. FURLEIGH (*bewildered*) — What word?

LADY MOON (*shortly*)—The word in season—always of all words the most offensive and the most ill-timed.

MRS. FURLEIGH (*reddening*)—I hope I should not say anything offensive.

LADY MOON (*carelessly*)—Oh, I did not know you meant yourself. I thought you wished me to speak to her.

MRS. FURLEIGH (*doubtfully*)—Oh, well, I think that one who has suffered the same bereavement— (*Abruptly*) How did you find her, Corisande?

THE MARQUISE (*evasively*)—It is so difficult to describe a mental condition. She was—oh, so surprised. I really must go back to her soon, poor child.

MRS. FURLEIGH—Most kind of you, I'm sure. Still, it is odd that she should prefer a stranger——

THE MARQUISE (*simply*)—A stranger is often preferred to a friend at these terrible moments. It is only then that we realise how little those we know best are really acquainted with us.

MRS. DUNSTABLE (*impulsively*) — Poor thing, I do hope she will marry again. I should be sorry to see a daughter of mine in such a position.

MRS. FURLEIGH (*earnestly*)—Yes, indeed, Mary, I often think that when I'm with my sons-in-law. A woman often chooses more wisely a second time. I do indeed hope that our poor young friend—you know my mother was her grandmother's most intimate friend—will marry again after a proper interval. Delicacy, even in these days, demands rather more than a year. Do you not think so? (*turning to the Marquise*). Flora tells me that the settlements were exceedingly handsome. Of course Sir Jugurtha saw to that. She was quite the beauty of that year; I

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remember my Gerald admired her so much. No, I don't fancy she will think any more of the young officer. It has been a silly flirtation, that is all. (*Meditatively*) I wonder if she has made any plans yet. Perhaps I might ask her to Erth for September. We should be very quiet.

THE MARQUISE — She has consented to return with me to France, probably till October.

LADY MOON (*warmly*) — That is really awfully kind of you. Much better for the poor thing in every way.

MRS. FURLEIGH (*dubiously*) — Yes, no doubt. Still (*suspiciously*) it is a very sudden decision and it has not been talked over at all. She would find French ways jar on her, I fear. (*The Marquise and Lady Moon move towards the staircase.*) I wonder if it really is settled.

MRS. DUNSTABLE — You mean about Lady Dovemere?

MRS. FURLEIGH (*frowning*) — Yes. It is hardly fair, and yet I don't think I can say anything. Of course it would be a splendid

thing for Corisande's second son. I must say it is very unbecoming to be thinking of such things, especially before the funeral. One never quite knows where one is with a Frenchwoman. I think I will write a line to Sir Jugurtha—that is, if anything is really settled.

MRS. DUNSTABLE (*whispering*)—The young man was over at the Rectory just before lunch. My husband saw him and——

MRS. FURLEIGH (*eagerly*)—How shameful! Not that I think there was anything really improper——

MRS. DUNSTABLE (*coldly*)—He came from the Bishop to inquire about the affair.

MRS. FURLEIGH—The Bishop ought to have sent a chaplain or a man-servant. I can see nothing in that young man. He may be a V.C., but he hardly spoke a word all through that lunch at the Palace. But then I admit one rarely sees nowadays the men I came across when I was a girl.

FOOTMAN (*approaching with a salver on which lie two telegrams*)—Please 'm, one of them——

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MRS. FURLEIGH (*taking up the telegrams*)
 —That will do, Robson. I will open them,
 as your master and Mrs. Wickham are both
 out. (*Turning to Mrs. Dunstable, and feel-
 ing for her eyeglasses*) No doubt something
 very important and immediate. (*Opening
 the first telegram*) I can't quite make this
 out, yet it is certainly about us. (*Reads
 slowly*) "Why no more from you wire im-
 mediately full Dovemere particulars any
 details re house party useful.—BRITANNIA."
 (*Thoughtfully*) Britannia? I seem to know
 the name. (*Illumined*) Why, it's where the
 omnibuses go to—oh yes, Mary, I do some-
 times go in omnibuses, the Death Duties
 have made it obligatory on many of my
 friends. Still, that does not explain this
 telegram. No doubt it is from some low
 horsey acquaintance of that poor wretched
 man. I shall advise Charlie not to answer
 such impertinent questions. (*Taking up the
 other message*) Why, this is addressed to my
 niece Jenny. What does this mean? "Un-
 derstand Dovemere tragedy occurred Wick-
 hams would please wire full particulars what

is mystery count on you absolutely before ten to-night special fee expense no object but wire press rates col if poss.—BUTTERDALE.”

MRS. DUNSTABLE (*mildly excited*)—I think the same person must have written both telegrams. You see they are very much alike.

MRS. FURLEIGH (*solemnly*)—So they are. I must get to the bottom of this matter. You see this first telegram is quite improperly addressed. “Stotch c/o Wickham.” Evidently Jenny has assumed that name for some purpose or (*with a legal air*) purposes of her own.

MRS. DUNSTABLE—Oh, I cannot believe that. She seems such a nice girl. Susan has always been specially fond of her.

MRS. FURLEIGH—Well, but see—“Miss Jane Butler-Green.” Can anything be clearer than that, Mary?

MRS. DUNSTABLE—I was thinking of “Stotch.” No doubt she will be able to explain.

MRS. FURLEIGH (*sighing*)—Indeed I hope so, for her poor mother’s sake. The other

two have done so very well, but Jenny was always the most like her father. Not but what he did very well for himself when he married my poor sister Olivia.

MRS. DUNSTABLE—Rose Moon was telling me the other day that Jenny had really a very good match in prospect—some cousin—I suppose a son of Lord Gallowglass. Rose said that the marriage was only a question of time. Hush! Here they are!

(Jenny and Olive Butler-Green, Susan Dunstable and Vere Standish come in to the hall together from the lawn.)

MRS. FURLEIGH (*grimly*)—Jenny, I have something to show you. (*Holding out the telegrams*) I believe these are your property.

JENNY (*carelessly*)—How odd, I suppose they are congratulations to the girls. (*Blushing*) People evidently think it's catching and that we've all three become engaged at once.

(Mrs. Dunstable, rising hastily, joins her daughter and Olive Butler-Green at the other end of the hall.)

MRS. FURLEIGH (*solemnly*)—Nothing of the kind! What does this mean?

JENNY (*coolly*)—This isn't addressed to me at all. Oh, stop a bit! Britannia—(*looking round for Vere Standish, then changing her mind*). Really, Aunt Jane, I can't tell you, but I must say I am surprised that Charlie should open other people's telegrams. Every one seems off their heads to-day.

MRS. FURLEIGH (*vexed*)—I suppose you will deny that this is addressed to you (*thrusting the second telegram into her niece's hand*).

JENNY (*surprised and angry*)—This? This telegram, Aunt Jane, is certainly mine. I wonder who opened it. No, I certainly won't explain anything about it. The person——

MRS. FURLEIGH (*pitilessly*)—Mr. Butterdale?

JENNY—No—no matter, it's my own business. Who could have opened it? I don't believe Charlie—no, it's such a dishonourable thing to do.

MRS. FURLEIGH (*confused*)—Ah, well, to-day is not like an ordinary day.

JENNY (*suspiciously*)—So it seems.

MRS. FURLEIGH (*plucking up courage*)—I

hate mysteries. What is all this about? As your aunt I have a right to ask.

JENNY—Aunt Jane, I don't wish to be rude to you, but you have no right—no right at all—now—to interfere in my affairs or my correspondence.

MRS. FURLEIGH (*agitated*)—I shall certainly tell your mother and—and—Gerald.

JENNY (*smiling and tearing up the telegram into little bits*)—I thought you were never going to mention my name again to Gerald, but you are quite at liberty to tell him about this telegram. I will write it out for you, I remember every word, only you must add that I did not answer it, and—and (*raising her voice*) Vere—Vere Standish! Will you come here a minute? (*Mr. Standish comes up with considerable reluctance, and Jenny hands him the telegram signed "Britannia."*) Do you not agree with me that this wire had better be destroyed—before Charlie sees it?

MR. STANDISH (*in a very bad temper*)—Yes, if you like. You seem to be managing it all.

JENNY (*contemptuously*)—It is obviously

an answer to one sent by you this morning. Will you please tear it up, or shall I?

MRS. FURLEIGH—I must protest. What is all this about?

MR. STANDISH—Pray, tear it up. It's of no consequence—none at all (*beating a hasty retreat*).

JENNY (*pursuing him*)—One word more. (*Whispers*) Take my tip. Let the "Trafalgar Flag" get its exclusives elsewhere, or you may find yourself excluded. See?

XXII

WHAT THE "DAILY COPYBOOK"
THOUGHT

WHAT THE "DAILY COPYBOOK" THOUGHT

IN the sub-editors' room at the office of the "Daily Copy-book" several cheerful-looking men are working at two tables, which are covered with a litter of pipes, pens, blue pencils, paste-pots, large cutting-out scissors, "copy" of various kinds, tobacco pouches, and newspapers in several stages of wear and tear. Corners of the room are occupied by files of papers on small tables, and rough shelves laden with the common books of reference. It is the business of the chief sub-editor, MR. WINTOUR, who sits at a raised rostrum, to distribute "copy" among his colleagues for them to prepare for the printers, and to know everything that is going on everywhere.

MR. WINTOUR (*glancing through a pile of "letters to the Editor," most of which he throws into the waste-paper basket*)—Unusual rubbish to-night! Listen to this! "Dear Sir—As our new cook has left us without the slightest warning, and we have two dinner-parties next week, have the

goodness to put my advertisement in as prominently as you can, and let me know how much I owe you for it.—Yours, etc.,
ETHELINDA OTTOLINE MABBS, Chatsworth House, Harringay.” Now that’s a perfumed billet-doux, addressed to the Editor and marked “Private.” Here, boy, take this to the advertisement clerk.

MR. O’GRADY (*laughing*)—Faith, they all think the editor writes every line of the paper, and prints it, and takes the money, and then drives round with it to the book-stalls.

MR. WINTOUR—Oh, it makes me tired the way they go on. “Sir—As an old volunteer officer of some thirty years’ standing, I enter my protest against the doctrines habitually preached from many metropolitan pulpits.” Fifteen folio pages! And the warrior wants half-a-dozen free copies of the paper with his letter in! Hullo, what’s this? “We understand that Dolores Drake, the authoress of that powerful problem novel ‘Jane and her Master,’ is not a pen-name as has been supposed. Miss Drake is a

young and brilliantly beautiful Creole, though lineally descended from Sir Francis Drake, but the instant success of her first book has not turned her pretty head in the least." Now I happen by a pure chance to know that Dolores Drake *is* a pen-name, and the book is by a briefless barrister. Ah, it's a sad world!

MR. PARRYBALL—But who sends in the brilliantly beautiful Creole?

MR. WINTOUR—Don't know. No name on it and it's type-written. Oh, here's a find! "Sir, a trifling domestic difference has led to my appearance at the Wellington Street police-court this morning. As a report of the case would injure me in my business, you will be good enough to leave it out, and I will pay whatever is customary on hearing from you.—Yours faithfully, JEREMIAH JONES." Really, Jeremiah takes my breath away! Let's see—Kaye, you've been doing the police reports, what's the case about?

MR. KAYE—Threw plates at his wife. Fined £5 and costs.

MR. WINTOUR—I see. Well, stick it in with a good headline, “A Brutal Husband” would do. Jeremiah wants a lesson. (*Some “copy” is brought in.*) Oh, here’s that Dovemere inquest. (*Tossing over a bundle of crisp and crinkly Post Office “flimsy” to Mr. Parryball.*) Cut it down a bit, Parryball, but we want a good story of course. What’s the verdict?

MR. PARRYBALL (*rustling through the last pages*)—Verdict? Hum, let’s see. Oh, “Accidental Death.”

MR. WINTOUR—Whew! Rather a knock-out for the “Trafalgar Flag” and its little boom. Rot even for August, I call it, making such a fuss over a failure like Dovemere. Why, bless your life, I remember him well when I was in the Gallery. Funny thing, I reported his best speech. It was one day when dear old Baby had a fit or something, and the chief wired to me to come up early and help with the Lords’ debate. Some parish pump business was on, and Dovemere was more than half screwed. My word, he did let them have

it! Talk of Randy in the old days, or even dear old Gorst! 'Course he had a thin House at first, but you should have seen how it filled up as he took his coat off and backhanded his own side till poor old, what's his name? who was Chancellor of the Duchy if I remember right——

MR. KAYE (*who has a Macaulayesque memory*)—The Lord Viscount Buntingham, G.C.B.

MR. WINTOUR (*gratefully*)—Ay, so it was, old Bunty sat there opening his mouth wider and wider, till finally the shock was too great and he had to be carted home in a cab by a secretary. Now, if only Dovemere had "ratted" then as everybody thought he would. Ah, that fatal drink! Let his meteoric career be a warning to you, my children! (*piously*).

MR. KAYE—"Meteoric" is good.

MR. PARRYBALL (*reading his "copy"*)—Blest if the witness Brook doesn't deny all the other strings except the one Dovemere fell over. Now why should he do that? There's something more in this than meets the eye.



MR. WINTOUR (*anxiously*)—Well, for mercy's sake don't write up the evidence, or you'll land us in a libel action.

MR. PARRYBALL—No, no, that's all right, but I'm hanged if I can make head or tail of Brook's evidence. If he denied anything, he ought to have denied everything. It's like the johnnies who've been to the Jews, there's always a few bills they don't own up to when papa has to pay.

MR. O'GRADY (*producing a newspaper cutting*)—Talking about Dovemere, I'd like to know what you fellows think of this from the so-called Gossip Column of the "Daily Marvel":—

Every one is talking about the tragic death of Lord Dovemere. I hear that his wife bears her terrible loss very bravely. Poor pretty woman! They were devoted in a fashion one rarely sees nowadays, and were never separated even for a day. At one time Lord Dovemere had the political ball at his feet, and many imaginative explanations were given for his apparently sudden distaste for public life,

and so on. That's what journalism has come

to! Where are the traditions, I ask, and where is the sanctimoniousness—I mean sanctity, of private life?

MR. WINTOUR—Oh, that's Mrs. Butterdale.

MR. O'GRADY—I am told she gets twelve or fifteen hundred a year for that sort of stuff!

MR. WINTOUR—Really, as much as that? Well, I suppose the public like it.

MR. O'GRADY (*flourishing the cutting*)—But the public oughtn't to like it, they should be made to like the old decent stuff, or go without!

MR. WINTOUR—It is awful bosh, certainly, and as regards Dovemere she simply doesn't know what she's talking about, unless indeed she knows too much. But go on, what's her exclusive of Dovemere's exit from politics?

MR. O'GRADY (*reading*)—

I happen to know that the truth, as in so many of these cases, was extremely simple and yet touching. This travelled man of the world discovered, very soon after his marriage with the 18-year-old daughter of Sir Thomas Jugurtha

Troy, that there is after all, even for a statesman, no place like home.

MR. WINTOUR—Oh, that's too much! If Dovemere ever stayed at home with his wife it was to beat her.

THE EDITOR (*an intellectual-looking man with enormous spectacles, coming in hurriedly*)—Oh! Wintour, have you got anything earthshaking?

MR. WINTOUR—I sent you in the German Emperor's three speeches, and the Tralala question, stormy debate in the Italian Chamber, large increase in Russian armaments, and the fall of the Bulgarian Ministry.

THE EDITOR—Yes, I know, I'll write on all that foreign stuff, but I want two or three domestic leaderettes. 'Pon my word, nothing seems to happen nearer than China nowadays.

MR. WINTOUR—Well, there's the usual breach of promise case, and some undergraduates run in at Vine Street.

THE EDITOR (*relieved*)—Good business! Now, O'Grady, I think you could do justice to both the breach of promise and the

undergraduates. I shall rely on you for at least three laughs. Anything else?

MR. WINTOUR—Oh, I was forgetting the Dovemere inquest—"Accidental Death."

THE EDITOR—Ah, I expected that. A country coroner's jury generally knows which side its bread is buttered. Who's preparing the inquest? Oh, you, Parryball—well, perhaps you would do a fairly long leaderette on the affair. The usual line, of course. You know the sort of thing.

EXTRACT from LEADERETTE appearing in the
"DAILY COPYBOOK" of August 13

. . . LORD DOVEMERE was not on our side, but he was a generous opponent, and his humour, though it terrified the dullards of his party, was the delight of all persons of taste and discrimination. A bit of string, indeed several bits of string, an empty-pate of the regular country-house type, a fall, and then a valuable life passes away in the soft August midnight! A great noble—a man who, we admit, had his faults, but still a great noble—is offered up as a sacrifice to make a jest for an idle crew of vacant-minded aristocrats. Oh, the pity of it, the tragedy of it! As for MR. "TOMMY" BROOK, his evidence was as confused as his ideas of humour are elementary.

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The whole affair loudly demands a searching investigation by an impartial and independent authority, for MR. BROOK's persistent assertion that he only tied up the one string over which LORD DOVEMERE fell and knew nothing of all the other strings is too large a draft on the credulity even of the most simple. The one clear-headed, sensible person in the whole miserable business was the French lady, the MARQUISE DE RABUTIN, who found the body. What a bitter commentary it all is on the boasted intelligence and culture and manners of the wealthy British leisured class! Yet we shrewdly suspect that even the most scatter-brain hostess will in future hesitate before she asks MR. "TOMMY" BROOK to her house, and so we have the consolation of thinking that this social butterfly, or rather parasite, though he cannot be punished for his schoolboy trick in schoolboy fashion as would be meet, will at any rate suffer in what is perhaps, after all, his tenderest spot—we mean his engagement book. Henceforth, we fancy, that volume will resemble the famous map in "The Hunting of the Snark"—"a perfect and absolute blank."

XXIII

THE MARQUIS DE RABUTIN
WRITES AGAIN

THE MARQUIS DE RABUTIN WRITES AGAIN
To the MARQUISE CORISANDE DE RABUTIN,
chez MONSIEUR DE WICKHAM,
Wickhamswould House,
Kent.

CHÂTEAU DE RABUTIN-CHANTAL,
Saturday.

VERY DEAR MAMAN,

How thoughtful of you to send us the English newspaper containing the history of my Lord Dovemere's terrible finish. He must have had a sympathetic character. In the few lines consecrated to his memory by the "Figaro," I see that he was a true friend of France and of humanity, never so content as when in Paris. But let me chase your sadness with recomforting news of our poor André. Our little combination

has succeeded like a charm, and, God be thanked, his leg is making progress. My wife's mother, always pessimistic, declared that disappointed love always flew to a wound, with I need hardly tell you very bad effects. She told Geneviève some remarkable examples bearing on this theory. Fortunately André's chagrin of heart has only affected his temper. I think he imagines a little what has taken place, but he sees the hand of Geneviève's mother in the affair. She is always so interested in other people's business, so all his fury is directed towards her.

The General was like himself, only more so. "B-r-r-r! Madame votre mèr-r-r-re m'a écr-r-rit un petit mot. Elle tient énor-r-r-mément au Capitaine Phar-r-ramond." Bref! dear Maman, to give you pleasure our kind old friend has obtained the well-merited promotion of that brave officer. Your kind heart will rejoice to learn that it is really an excellent thing for him. Was to him a word said? Che lo sa? I can only tell you that our fair vaporous enemy has vanished,

probably enchanted to pass a few days in the Bon Marché before proceeding to a new and delightful garrison where she will find, no doubt, other foolish boys to spend on her their monies and their hearts.

You will ask me how André accepted the thing. We were all afraid he would kick off his bandages, he is such a child! Geneviève, as always, undertook the disagreeable duty. She had a bad quarter of an hour. I could hear her dear kind voice, "Voyons, mon ami, voyons!" Then followed, it seems, a little sermonette, by which time she judged him worthy of a visit from his nephew. Whether this so proved to him the folly of les amours stériles may be doubted, but the dear woman—honi soit qui mal y pense—naturally considered it conclusive. Il me boude encore. Geneviève alone receives his sacred confidences, and she will not betray them. He disdains pity, and once more mocks my wife's mother, who is magnanimous to the point of rejoicing in this sign of convalescence.

Geneviève keeps him in her boudoir, for

we are overwhelmed with visitors, all anxious to express their interest and sympathy with—the leg. Geneviève and her excellent mother mount on the breach with that gallantry which is so peculiarly feminine. The more favoured of their guests are allowed to go upstairs and just press his hand, but no talking is allowed. Naturally the “gossips” are endless, no wonder the verb *potiner* has passed into our tongue. The least that is said is that André’s sprain is really a terrible wound, the result of a duel with Pharamond. It is to cut short this talk that Geneviève compels him to see some of our friends. How sublime is the innocency of my wife!

I have left little place for all I could tell you à propos of your grandson. At this moment his volatile hands, already approximate in size to those of his mother, are pursuing the sunbeams on the floor. Here is human life in little! Here he resembles you, who have been all your life catching sunshine to shed on those you love.

Your son who loves you with all his heart,

PAUL.

XXIV

SIR GEORGE IS PERSUADED

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IN the August night the gardens of Wickhamswould House lie full of half-lighted distances, fragrant with many flower-beds stretching to the haha that divides them from the wide park beyond.

SIR GEORGE (*drawing the Marquise's hand through his arm*)—And so you sacrifice the rest of your holiday—of our holiday—to that foolish woman. I think she might have gone to her own people. You mustn't expect her to behave herself, eh? That other fool will be after her in a day or two——

THE MARQUISE (*seriously*)—She has promised me to be reasonable—for a little while.

SIR GEORGE (*grumbling*)—Yes, but does she know what you mean by a little while?

THE MARQUISE—Ah?

SIR GEORGE—Eighteen years! It is

eighteen years, isn't it? I don't fancy he'll be as patient as that, eh?

THE MARQUISE (*smiling through the half-darkness*)—Oh, I should never dream of instituting a comparison so favourable to the V.C. hero.

SIR GEORGE (*relenting*)—Still you must admit that it is too bad. Everything was arranged so—so——

THE MARQUISE—Comfortably. That is the nicest of your English words.

SIR GEORGE—Yes, we should have been so comfortable. Olivia would have chaperoned you at Chenies, André could have come and cured his wounded heart—to say nothing of his leg—and now all our plans are upset because——

THE MARQUISE—You would not have wished the poor creature to begin her new existence with a scandal? (*A pause.*) She has no children to protect her. The man will follow her, no doubt, but there will only be Geneviève to shock. (*Dropping her voice*) Ah, Georges, you do not realise that in the last few days I have lived a part of my life

over again. I know from intimate knowledge how much easier it is for a woman to be true to the man she loves than it is for her to be true to herself. None of the women here understand as I understand what Lady Dove-mere has experienced.

SIR GEORGE (*shortly*)—Pray do not compare yourself to that foolish girl. At no time——

THE MARQUISE (*quietly*)—Yes, there was a time. My dear friend, you and I must be true, even in speech, to one another. There was a time when I in my poor heart committed murder many times. It was not all for you or even for myself. My worst moments were those when I thought of my children—of what his example would make them. Ah, Georges, can you wonder that my heart was filled with pity, with horror, (*lower*) with fear?

SIR GEORGE (*suddenly*)—Then you also suspected—I mean till Tommy Brook confessed?

THE MARQUISE (*in a whisper*)—Yes. There was but one string and——

SIR GEORGE—Then, then you——

THE MARQUISE—The ball of string was there. Ah, j'ai fait très mal. But indeed I would have confessed if they had asked me at that horrible inquest (*shuddering*).

SIR GEORGE (*fervently*)—Thank Heaven they did not! But what made you think of doing such a thing?

THE MARQUISE—I had only a moment, and the ball of string was there, under my hand. I thought—I imagined——

SIR GEORGE—That you were saving her neck from another sort of cord?

THE MARQUISE (*bursting into tears*)—Yes, oh yes! You always put things so clearly, ami Georges. The poor creature had talked to me. She was desperate.

SIR GEORGE—Well, I must admit we all should have suspected her—but for you. Still, that French love of, shall we say management, is rather dangerous, eh? I think the sooner you come and manage me the better it will be for us all. You never thought Paul and André would get on without you even for a month, yet you see

André's affair has settled itself as I always thought it would.

THE MARQUISE—How so?

SIR GEORGE — Why, by Pharamond's getting another billet, to be sure!

THE MARQUISE (*absently*)—Ah yes, you always know best. You know I never take any one else's advice.

SIR GEORGE (*laughing*)—You generally consult yourself—good French expression that. Still I admit you have always known what would be the best thing for your boys.

THE MARQUISE (*softly*)—Dieu s'est dit, "Je ne peux pas être partout"—et Il créa la mère.

EXTRACT from the "DAILY MARVEL" of October 4

TWO ENGAGEMENTS.

Two engagements of special interest to Devonshire and Buckinghamshire folk are announced. Mr. Gerald Furleigh, whose beautiful place, Erth, is one of the glories of the West country, is to marry his cousin, Miss Jenny Butler-Green, who is a great-niece of Lord Gallowglass. It was only the other day that she was bridesmaid to her elder sister at the latter's marriage to the Dean of Buntingham. The engagement is naturally a source of great satisfaction to the family, the more so as the future

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mistress of Erth is not only the namesake of her mother-in-law to be, but strongly resembles her in appearance and disposition.

AN ANGLO-FRENCH ALLIANCE.

A marriage has also been arranged between Sir George Chenies, who is uncle to both Mr. Furleigh and Miss Butler-Green, and the Marquise de Rabutin, who it will be remembered played a highly creditable part in the tragic affair of Lord Dovemere's death. The engagement is quite a middle-aged romance. Sir George was much struck by the good sense and kindness of heart displayed by the Marquise, at whose lovely château Angela Lady Dovemere has been spending a portion of the autumn. The short acquaintance quickly ripened into friendship, and as the Marquise has no children she was the more willing to make England her adopted country. Both marriages are expected to take place before Christmas.

THE END